EASTER HOLIDAY NUMBER. GREAT NEW COMPETITION.

SHORT STORIES.

No. 745.] Week ending April 11th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

HE GAVE A START. THE HEAD OF THE DIVER WAS THAT OF A YOUNG AND LOVELY WOMAN!

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THE CORNER PICTURES IN THIS NUMBER ARE TYPES OF HANDSOME MEN OF EVERY COUNTRY.

SHORT STORIES

No. 745.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending April 11th, 1903.

A RATIONAL WOMAN.

And How She was Won by an Irrational Man.

BERTRAM FERRARS, a rising young barrister, was very much in love with his *fiancée*, Agnes Dalton, in spite of the disparity of years, tastes, and ideas.

Mutual friends marvelled at this engagement; Agnes Dalton was, they thought, so little like the girl on whom such a man would lose his heart.

Studious and reserved, Ferrars had mostly spent his life amongst his books. He hated society, noise and racket of every description, but, suddenly, he reached the turning point in his life, and his views on most subjects changed, owing to the glance of two lovely blue eyes.

Agnes Dalton was the very reverse of Ferrars in every way. Her sunny nature and temperament delighted in the giddy vortex of society; she loved dancing, ping-pong, tennis, and boating, all these pastimes she called rare good fun; her creed was to get the most enjoyment possible out of life.

She was sparkling, full of fun and mischief, and young Ferrars fell head over heels in love with her. She was flattered by the courtship of this clever young man, and, when he proposed, she accepted him without a moment's hesitation; it was a delightful privilege to be envied by every girl she knew.

Like most men who are in love for the first time, he took the malady in its very acutest form; he became Agnes' willing slave, ready to obey her slightest behest; she exercised her new power with childish delight, and soon got to love him almost as deeply as he did her, only, womanlike, she did not show it to him.

One morning, as young Ferrars called round at Laburnum Lodge, the suburban villa where Agnes lived, he was met by his pretty little lady-love dancing down the gravel path in a high state of glee.

"Oh, Bert, Bert! Just guess the lovely present I have received from Uncle Henry!"

"Well, little one, what is it that seems to have given you so much pleasure? My presents to you never seem to produce such exuberant joy!"

"Nasty, jealous wretch!" she murmured, looking up archly at him from under her long lashes, and, as they had reached the privacy of the drawing-room, he at once punished her by catching her round the waist and drawing her close to him till her head rested on his shoulder.

"Now, Aggy, dearest, you are my prisoner, and must pay forfeit as having used disrespectful language to me."

"Pay forfeit! How?"

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And she opened her big, blue eyes to their very widest extent, looking the very picture of innocent surprise, as if she could not possibly guess what he wanted.

"Aggy, you're a little fraud!"

"Bertie, that's rude, you will have to pay forfeit to me!"

"All right, as much as ever you like!" and he showered down kisses on the dainty little mouth held up so temptingly close to his face.

She laughingly disengaged herself from his encircling arm, and, flying to the other end of the room, at a safe distance from him, menacingly shook her little pink fist at him.

"Now, now, Bert! do be serious, I want to talk business to you."

"Talk business—*you*, Aggy; well, upon my word, do you want to consult me about the best cut for your doll's dress, or what?"

"Tush, silly man!" and she patted his cheek reprovingly. "This matter is very urgent and very important. Do you bicycle?"

"Bicycle? Well, yes, I rather enjoy a good long spin on a clear, smooth, country road, but I have very little time to indulge in this pastime. But why on earth do you ask?"

"Oh, then it is all right if you do bicycle! I was afraid you would think it too frivolous. The present I have received this morning from Uncle Henry is a beautiful bicycle, and I want to try it this very afternoon. Come and fetch me, please, dear Bert!"

Ferrars never could resist that sweet, childish, pleading voice.

"All right, dearest, I'll put off a rather important engagement, but never mind."

She pouted her rosy lips.

"No engagement ought to be important, compared with the one to me!"

"Dear little goose, of course you are first in all my thoughts, but you must remember that if a barrister does not keep his business engagements, his little wife won't have all the luxuries he means her to have."

Naturally Agnes carried the day, and, punctually at four that same afternoon, young Ferrars turned up at Laburnum Lodge in a neat Norfolk suit and on a well-appointed bicycle. The maid showed him into the drawing-room, telling him Miss Dalton was not quite ready, but would be down in a few minutes. He took up a photograph album and was soon absorbed gazing at different aspects of his little sweetheart at various times of her babyhood and childhood. A slight

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step, the one he knew so well and loved, made him turn, and Agnes stood before him with a lovely blush crimsoning her cheeks, and even tinting the pallor of her brow. Bertram started to his feet.

"Good gracious, Aggy, what on earth do you mean by this absurd masquerade?"

"Masquerade, indeed!" she indignantly protested. "I had it specially made for me in Paris by one of the best tailors!"

"I might have guessed the horrible thing was French, thank goodness they are not worn in England! I can't think what you mean, Aggy, by donning such an unwomanly attire?"

"Mean? Why, I mean to go for a bicycle ride with you, of course!" Her voice was pitching itself in a dangerously high key as her indignation grew.

"You really thought of going out with *me* in 'bloomers'?" he asked, in the same tone he would have asked if she were going to walk on her head.

"Yes, certainly, this is the rational dress worn by the real up-to-date twentieth century girl."

"Rational fiddlesticks!"

"I think it is a most becoming dress, and it suits me beautifully."

"Why, Aggy, you look positively ugly in this vile get-up!"

"Ugly! You dare call me ugly?" shrieked outraged feminine vanity. The scream of horror ended in a big sob, and she went on piteously—

"I hate you, I shall never, never speak to you again!"

Ferrars, absolutely bewildered by the storm his unwary words had raised, drew near, and tried to take her hand, but she pushed him roughly away.

"Go away, leave me, don't touch me. I never want to see you again! Good-bye for ever, Mr. Ferrars!"

She rushed from the room, leaving him standing speechless with pain. The words she had just uttered in her wrath seemed to enter his heart like a knife, especially did it strike him as an ominous knell to all his hopes—the fact that she had called him *Mr. Ferrars*. After a few moments he rang the bell, and, when the maid appeared, he bid her go to Miss Dalton and tell her he awaited her pleasure in the drawing-room. Within a very short time space of, the servant returned with a curt message from her young mistress—

"Would Mr. Ferrars excuse her coming down, she felt too ill to leave her room."

The young man mournfully left the house. Good Heavens, it could not be that he had sinned past forgiveness, that Aggy meant, as she had said, never to speak to him again, and to break off their engagement. He had been rash, impetuous to denounce this horrible rational dress so very candidly, but then he had been inexpressibly shocked and grieved to see his darling attired in this masculine garb. It seemed to go against all his old-fashioned notions on womanly modesty and feminine dignity. His Agnes, the idol of his heart, his angel of purity and paragon of perfect womanhood, to have donned coarse, vulgar bloomers, the very thought was maddening. And now he had offended her, she declared, past all forgiveness.

He spent a sleepless night and came round early next morning to call at Laburnum Lodge.

"Miss Dalton?" he queried.

"Not at home," was the immediate answer from the maid, Jessie, who tried to convey in her tone and manner as much respectful sympathy as she could express. Ferrars was quick to notice this, he had at least one friend in the camp, and by this one ally, he hoped to gain admission into the presence of his irate little lady-love.

"Come, Jessie, nonsense! Miss Dalton isn't out at this hour of the day! You're telling me a fib!"

Jessie, looking embarrassed, fumbled with the hem of her dainty, spotless apron.

"Well, sir, I'm only telling the fib Miss Aggy told me to say!"

"Ah, I thought as much! What did she say to you?"

"Oh, please, sir, don't ask; if I tell you it will hurt you awfully hard!"

"Never mind, Jessie, I would rather know the worst!"

"Well, Miss Agnes, she never slept all night, I could see it this morning by her poor, sweet, pretty eyes that looked as if she had been crying for hours, with great rings under them, and when I brought her a cup of tea and the dainty, crisp toast she loves, she pushed the tray from her."

"Take it away, Jessie, I am not hungry this morning."

"Poor little lamb," thought I, "she is just breaking her own heart by quarrelling with her young man!"

Then, just as I was leaving the room, she called me back.

"'Jessie?'"

"'Yes, miss!'"

"'If Mr. Ferrars should call to-day at any time, you are always to say I am not at home.'"

"She gulped down a big sob, poor, motherless dear, I felt someone must comfort her, and, though I am only her maid, she had no one else at the time, so I came quite close to the bed and said soothingly—

"'Oh, come, Miss Agnes, dear, you don't mean it! Why, Mr. Ferrars and you are engaged!'"

"'No, we are not engaged,' she snapped, 'and I shall never see him again, never read another of his letters; he told me yesterday I was ugly, yes, positively ugly! Those were his very words'—and she began to cry again as if her poor young heart would break. Oh, sir, how could you say such a thing to my beautiful Miss Agnes?"

"Ah, Jessie, you may well ask, but I was mad, beside myself, it was that horrible dress did all the mischief. But, Jessie, you must admit me, let me see her once more, and I shall crave her pardon on my bended knees. She must, she will forgive me, if I can only see her."

"But, sir, I dare not, she would dismiss me at once."

Bertram fumbled in his pocket and drew out a bright new sovereign, which he tried to slip into the girl's palm, but she drew back with a proud toss of the head.

"No, sir, I wouldn't do it for money; if I let you in to see my young lady, it is only because I think it is for her good. I know she is wretched at having quarrelled with you."

"You're a good girl, Jessie, and I shall find some better means of requiting you."

"Well, sir, it is just this way—my young man, he is a sailor lad in the King's service, and I know if I had fallen out with him I should be ready to pluck my hair from my head, so I can just imagine how bad poor Miss Agnes feels. Come, I shall take you to her, and just trust to your making your peace with her, in which case she won't dismiss me."

"God bless you, Jessie," said Ferrars heartily, as he followed Jessie with a soft and careful tread up the carpeted stairs till they reached the drawing-room. The girl opened the door, and signed to him to go in.

"There, sir," she whispered, "Miss Agnes sits yonder in the morning-room, go in and tell her she is the prettiest girl on earth, and she'll soon forgive you!"

Bertram paid no heed to the maid's parting words of advice, he hurried through the drawing-room, paused on the threshold of the next room, then he gently moved the heavy

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velvet drapery which hung across the opening and gazed in. Agnes sat on a low couch her eyes red with recent weeping; on a small table at her elbow was placed a cabinet photograph of young Ferrars which he himself had given her; on her knees and on the couch by her were all the letters and notes he had on various occasions written to her, also the sundry presents and souvenirs he had bestowed on her, such as books, music, bouquet-holders, and scent-bottles, fans, and bangles; all the miscellaneous gifts a young fellow thinks of to bestow on the lady of his choice.

A slight movement of his revealed his presence, and she turned hastily. When her eyes met his, a hot flush suffused her cheeks, and she rose angrily to her feet, all the letters fluttering to the ground.

"You here, Mr. Ferrars?"

"Yes, Agnes, darling, I have come to implore you to forgive me."

"I really thought you were gentlemanly enough not to force your way into a lady's presence, when she refuses to hold any sort of intercourse with you in future," she said scornfully, pointedly averting her gaze from him while she spoke.

"Agnes."

"Call me Miss Dalton, please."

He bent his head in acquiescence to her haughty command.

"Be it as you will, but, Miss Dalton, may I inquire if you wish to dismiss me so entirely from your thoughts, why I find you seated with all the little gifts I ever gave you?"

"I was preparing to pack them and send them back to you," came the chilling answer.

"Indeed! And these letters?"

"I was going to burn them."

"And this photo?"

"Was meant to share the fate of the letters."

Quite coolly and deliberately Bertram walked back towards the heavy velvet hanging, waved it back with one hand, then turned and bowed coldly to Agnes.

"I see my best and wisest course, Miss Dalton, is to bid you good-bye, and the sooner I put your name and personality out of my thoughts the better for my peace of mind."

So saying he strode rapidly out of the room, and Agnes thought he had for ever passed out of her life. She was aghast, she never expected him to take his dismissal so calmly, she thought he would beg and implore her forgiveness, instead of which he was content to go at her bidding, and his sudden departure overwhelmed her with despair.

She flung herself on the couch, burying her face on the softly-tinted Liberty silk cushion.

"Oh, Bertie, Bertie, my darling, you never loved me," she moaned piteously.

As she uttered this agonised wail, two strong arms lifted her in a close and tender embrace.

"Aggy, Aggy, my own darling, why your Bertie loves you so, that your cruelty drove him to the brink of despair!"

She gave a little gasp and made a feeble pretence at freeing herself from his encircling arms, but she soon gave up the attempt, and, nestling her head on his shoulder, murmured:

"Oh! Bertie, I thought you were gone for ever, that I should never see you again!"

"Well, little one, and was it not what you desired me to do?"

She looked roguishly up into his face, so dangerously close to hers.

"You dear old goose, don't you know yet that a woman always expects a man to do the opposite of what she bids him do?"

"Indeed, well this is a thing to remember in my married life later on, such scraps of knowledge come in useful when the fetters of wedlock hold a man in their thraldom. By-the-bye, Aggy, I suppose we are to be married after all?"

She pursed up her lovely rosy lips into the most bewitching of pouts.

"I suppose I *must* overlook your atrocious conduct?"

"Ah! so far so good. And must I call you Miss Dalton?"

"Don't be silly, Bertie."

"Aggy, may I kiss you?"

"Certainly not."

The words were hardly out of her mouth ere he kissed her lips, cheeks, and brow. She struggled so to free herself this time, that she accomplished the feat, and, taking up her post by the window, exclaimed:

"Here, at any rate, I am safe, you will hardly venture to kiss me so that all the neighbours over the way can see you!"

"Hang the neighbours; you need not look so indignant at me. Aggy, you ordered me to kiss you!"

"You horrid wretch, telling such a monstrous fib!"

"You told me not to, and that, I have it from your own lips, amounts to an imperative command do to it."

"Nonsense. But tell me, Bert, is it not very generous and Christian-like of me to forgive you, when you have never even apologised?"

"Good gracious, Aggy! What on earth do you mean by this absurd masquerade!"

"Apologised for what?" innocently queried the offending culprit.

"For what?" she shrieked, "he dares to ask for what, when he brutally avowed to me that he thought me ugly?"

"I absolutely deny the charge! Darling, how could I call my Queen of Beauty ugly! Why, before your charms the golden rays of Phœbus pale, the silver beams of the moon shine dimly when compared with the lustre of your eyes!"

"Flatterer!" But, notwithstanding, Agnes beamed on her appreciative lover. "Still, deny it as you will, you did call me ugly when I wore the rational dress."

"Impossible, my dear girl, you must have dreamt it!"

"Then," she retorted triumphantly, "I shall put it on this afternoon, and you will take me for a ride on my new bike?"

She said this, half fearing this bold and final test of hers to see if his repentance were indeed sincere.

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"Certainly, darling, you are absolutely free to wear whatever attire you think best."

This new-born blind deference to her wishes delighted Agnes. It was worth all the agony of quarrelling with Bertie, if only to come out so triumphantly from the debate.

* * * * *

Punctually at two o'clock that same afternoon, Jessie came up to her young mistress' bedroom, she seemed to be convulsed with suppressed laughter and held her handkerchief well choked over her mouth, as if she feared her unseemly mirth might break forth.

"Please, miss, Mr. Ferrars is in the drawing-room and wants to know if you are ready?"

Aggy was putting the finishing touches to her rational dress.

"Yes, in a few minutes. Jessie, how do I look? Don't you think these bloomers are the sweetest things in the world?"

"Yes, miss, you're all right—but Mr. Ferrars, he *does* look funny," and she giggled audibly.

"Don't be an idiot, Jessie, what's the matter with you laughing in that silly way, and what in the world do you mean talking like that of Mr. Ferrars?"

So saying, as she had just put the finishing touches to her masculine dress, she hurried down to the drawing-room. But she stopped aghast on the threshold thinking her eyes must be playing her false, or else that she was the victim of an extraordinary optical delusion. Bertram stood before the glass over the mantelpiece, complacently admiring the grotesque figure cast back at him by the mirror. Indeed, his get-up was ludicrous in the extreme. His athletic figure was robed in the complete outfit of a lady bicyclist. His dainty pale pink blouse was tucked in at the waist with a belt and buckle, the dark blue serge skirt fell in graceful folds just above the ankles, while on his head was set the jauntiest of white sailor-hats; a white spotted veil shaded his bronzed face, and fell over his hirsute moustaches which protruded in the most aggressive way.

"Bertie!" Aggie exclaimed, her voice bristling with indignation, "what on earth do you mean by this absurd get-up?"

"Mean, my angel, why I mean to take you out for a ride on your new bicycle."

"What! Attired thus?"

"Why not? If you insist on usurping the garb of a man, well then nothing remains for me to do but to sink my personality in that of a woman!"

"Bertie, do give up this nonsense, go and change at once!"

"Impossible, my pet, you see I leave you free to dress as you think best suits you, surely you might leave me the same liberty, and allow me to attire myself as my fancy prompts me to do."

"But, Bertie, this is a mad freak," and she stamped her tiny foot, in her sore vexation at the new and unexpected turn of events.

He bent his head in acquiescence to her haughty command.

"Why so, darling? If you will wear the breeches, nothing remains to me but the distaff and spindle. Come, let us be starting."

"What, do you think I should go out with you so?"

"Well, darling, to tell you the truth, I must confess I really think the pink of this blouse and the white veil suit my complexion to a T. I never thought myself good-looking till I donned all this feminine gear. You ladies have the advantage over us in the way of finery," and he once more turned to the mirror and cast admiring glances at himself.

This was too much for her, she burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Oh, you excruciating goose; why, Bert, you are as ugly as one of the chimpanzees at the Zoo, and quite as comical!"

"That's better, Aggy, love; I like to see you laugh, because then I know you are not going to vow and protest you don't mean to marry me. Though I am sure you really do."

"Well, I shall certainly not go to the altar with you in this rig out!"

"No doubt for that propitious day you will yourself consent to don a skirt, so that I can wear trousers as the badge of my manhood! Otherwise you could not possibly expect the poor parson to unite in the bonds of holy matrimony two persons wearing men's attire. He would get horribly mixed up in putting the right question to each of us; he might tell *me* perchance to obey you instead of only loving and cherishing you!"

"You are very pat with the service for the solemnisation of matrimony!"

"Well, Aggy, it's only wisdom to prepare one's self for coming events."

"Bertie," she said softly (unwilling to assume the appearance of giving in, and yet she felt there was nothing for it but that) "wilful man must have his way; if I consent to give up wearing my beautiful Paris suit, will you promise me to throw off this grotesque costume and never to let me see you arrayed so?"

"Darling, of course I'm willing to sacrifice all my personal tastes to your wishes. You know connubial bliss consists mainly in reciprocal concessions on the part of husband and wife. The only thing that worries me is to know which character you really mean to assume, the man's or the woman's; take your choice, dearest. I am not particular, I only wish to know definitely, and then to take the part you do not wish to enact."

"Oh! Bert, you are too silly for words." Still, she could not help laughing, "off with you now, and mind you come back in an hour's time properly dressed, and I shall then be ready to go for that long postponed ride, with a bicycling skirt. There, are you satisfied now, oh, most obstinate of men?"

"Delighted, I am sure. The fact is, so long as you insisted on being a rational woman I had to be an irrational man."

Lily Butler.

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Under False Pretences.

THE TALE OF A DANCE AND ITS SEQUEL.

I WILL endeavour to relate how two foolish mistakes on one occasion resulted most excellently, and brought the first glimpses of romance into the life of Margaret Chalmers.

Pale-faced, underpaid little work-girl, her existence had been grey and monotonous indeed; and trudging wearily along with thin shoes and tired eyes, over Blackfriars Bridge one murky evening, in company with a vast multitude of other brave toilers, she inevitably fell to pondering over the uselessness of it all.

Margaret reached a dingy side street eventually, pushed open a door without knocker or paint, and mounted the stairs towards an attic on the fourth floor.

"Miss Chalmers, is that you?" piped a shrill woman's voice from the basement.

"Yes, Mrs. Muggridge, I shan't want any tea this evening, thank you," she responded, calling to mind the smallness of the funds in hand.

"Oh, very well. There's a letter for you on the mantelshelf."

"A letter for me! Oh, thank you!"

When one receives on an average one per annum, it will be understood that the arrival of a letter is an event of extreme importance. Margaret forgot all her weariness as she eagerly snatched the packet from the mantelshelf. It was an imposing, crested envelope, addressed to "Miss Chalmers," and a myriad of confused, expectant thoughts surged through the girl's mind.

The mysterious communication was as follows:

"*Woodstock,*
"*Grosvenor Terrace,*
"*West Kensington,*
"24.11.'02.

"*Mr. and Mrs. Hartley Mannering are giving a small dance at the Kensington Town Hall on Thursday, 1st January, New Year's Day, and would esteem the pleasure of your company upon that occasion.*
"8 *p.m. until* 3 *a.m.*"

"It must be some mistake, of course," Margaret mused, twisting the letter in her fingers, and examining it minutely. "I've never even heard of the people. Besides, who would dream of asking me to a fashionable dance. If it were a fancy dress, though, I could go as Cinderella, perhaps—in her kitchen rags."

Having reviewed the situation from every possible point of view, an adventurous spirit came over the girl, and she retired that night determined at all hazards—mistake or no mistake—to attend the dance. With infinite care she indited a careful note in the morning, accepting the invitation.

The idea seemed so quaint that she laughed to herself at intervals during the day.

"It will be something to talk about, at all events, I can quite easily manœuvre a dress "for one night only," she went on merrily. "A cab will be absolutely necessary as well. I do hope that no titled personage will be fascinated by my charms. He'll be most grievously disappointed, and terribly cross, methinks. Any way, the invitation is addressed to Miss Chalmers, and Miss Chalmers will endeavour to do herself justice."

* * * * *

On the evening of New Year's Day, it was really a delightful little personage who alighted from a hansom at Kensington Town Hall, and demurely presented herself to Mr. and Mrs. Mannering. They received their guest most graciously, and the only possible obstacle to complete enjoyment was removed.

Margaret, after a time, became quite convinced that no mistake had been perpetrated after all. Someone, perhaps, had heard of her straitened circumstances—even taken a passing fancy for her—and hence the invité.

As a matter of fact, the girl, slim, graceful, with curiously pretty, nut-brown hair, and refined features, distinctly held her own, and found quite a circle of admirers. One young gentleman in particular appeared to be greatly impressed with Miss Chalmers—and introduced as Reginald Cleaver, fair-haired, with well-favoured, clear-cut features, typical of buoyant youth, he became distinctly impudent, and pleaded for the favour of six dances in succession.

"Most decidedly not," piquantly retorted Margaret. "It would be quite unfair to the others, and extremely bad taste in addition."

"Nonsense, Miss Chalmers! Why people should be regulated by a code of absurdly narrow regulations, compiled by old fogies, I have never been able to understand."

"I am much afraid that some people need regulating all the same."

"You are really unkind! I form my own code of rules to correspond with my circumstances and company. Given an elderly spinster as partner, I am content to be strictly orthodox, and have but one dance. Given you, Miss Chalmers, the system is idiotic. We no sooner become interested in conversation, and—in each other, than you are claimed by some apology for a man who will bore you to death."

"Oh, I am not so sure of that! Mr. Woodford is really an excellent fellow, whilst there are——"

Mr. Cleaver became seriously in earnest, and interrupted impetuously.

"I know! There are scores of them, all buzzing round you. For that very reason I ask you what I do. Miss Chalmers, please, please let me have six dances—I have so much to say to you—will you?"

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"Yes!"

The state of affairs now became somewhat dangerous. During the six dances in question, Mr. Cleaver became annoyingly inquisitive, and Margaret's attempts to evade his thinly-veiled questions were decidedly exciting.

"Have you a great distance to go to reach your home, Miss Chalmers?"

"Oh, no! A cab will take me there for one-and sixpence, I believe. Isn't this a delightful waltz, Mr. Cleaver? Do you remember its title?"

"'The Dance of Pierrot!' It is rather original, distinctly out of the ordinary sort. Have you danced much this season, Miss Chalmers?"

"Oh, yes, very frequently."

Margaret told the fib most elegantly.

"It's wonderfully strange that I have never met you."

"Quite possibly you have. One can't remember everyone one meets."

"That may be, but I have never met you before, Miss Chalmers. No one could dance with you and forget it."

"Do I dance so very badly, then?"

"I do wish you would not treat my remarks as jokes. I feel more serious, somehow, to-night, than I have ever felt in my life."

The conversation continued in a varied strain until supper. As Margaret descended with Mr. Cleaver to the ball-room to resume the programme, the inevitable occurred.

"Miss Chalmers, will you grant me a very great favour? May I escort you home to-night?"

Margaret blushed with confusion. She would have given all her possessions to consent, but the thought of exposure was unendurable.

"I'm afraid not, my father will be here to meet me."

"At least, then, you will introduce me to him?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure!"

At this critical juncture Miss Chalmers did the only thing she thought possible under the circumstances.

Whilst Mr. Reginald Cleaver was waltzing severely with a stout member of the aristocracy, a cab was hailed, and Miss Chalmers, in Cinderella fashion, was whirled away from the scene of her triumph.

Arrived at the attic, how sordid and gloomy everything appeared after the glittering glamour of the dance.

Margaret surveyed her elegant self in the broken mirror, and laughed with glee. She looked at the dismal surroundings, thought of the morrow, realised that the end of the adventure had come, and burst into tears.

In all the days of her monotonous, weary, work-a-day life, that following the dance was at once the most dreary and dismal. The same pale-faced work-girl trudged wearily home.

"There's another letter for you to-night, miss!" With strange forebodings Margaret absolutely ran upstairs, and tore open the envelope.

From Reginald Cleaver! Her heart beat with joy, for perhaps the end of her delightful escapade had not come, perhaps only the beginning. The letter would show.

"Why had she left so hurriedly without a good-bye? Had he done aught to offend her? To add to his misery he had overheard that she had left alone, her father had not called. She was unkind indeed not to accept his escort. Might he take the great liberty of calling upon her one day? Would Miss Chalmers drop a little note giving permission?" It was a plaintive letter, but the curious part to Margaret was the postscript.

"You will wonder, Miss Chalmers, by what means I obtained your address. Please allow me to call, and I will explain. I also want to impart to you an important secret—not entirely unconnected with myself."

The girl finished the epistle in a state of complete bewilderment. To allow Mr. Cleaver to call upon her in a dingy attic was a preposterous idea. To arrange an interview with him outside would appear mysterious, evasive, and yet it was the only alternative.

She would meet him and confess everything. The matter would end for ever—it was absurd and wicked to carry the deception further. In her secret heart, however, I am afraid that Miss Margaret Chalmers was not quite so convinced that the affair had ended, as she determined to explain to Mr. Cleaver.

* * * * *

A crisp, wintry morning at Kensington Gardens, and a well-set-up young man was pacing vigorously up and down the length of the Flower Walk. Ten minutes late, Margaret appeared, unusually rosy and happy.

"Ah, Miss Chalmers, I am really delighted you have put in an appearance. I began to fear this appointment was another caprice." He looked at her steadily.

"Another caprice? How do you mean, Mr. Cleaver?"

"Your sudden disappearance from the dance, without bidding good-bye to a soul—it was too cruel!"

"I could not help it—I—I—felt suddenly unwell." And then, stifling her confusion with an effort, "What did you wish to see me about—something about—yourself, I believe?"

"Yes, something very important. I ought to have told you before. I have been a cad, Miss Chalmers!"

They were not seated, and the man tapped the gravel uneasily with his stick. Margaret flushed, glanced at him suddenly, and lowered her eyes.

"I don't understand!"

"It would be wonderfully strange if you did!" A slight awkward pause of a few seconds, and Reginald Cleaver turned to the girl suddenly, blurting out—

"Miss Chalmers, I'm not a gentleman, you see!"

Margaret looked inquiringly, and he continued—

"I went to that ball like a cad, under false pretences. I intended it just for a prank—to meet you, Miss Chalmers, forgive me for saying so, is to love you. I commenced by deceiving you, and hadn't the heart to tell you the truth. You see, I'm not a gentleman, Miss Chalmers, only just a valet."

Another long pause, and he glanced cautiously at Margaret.

"Well, Miss Chalmers, what have you to say to me after this confession?"

Margaret laid her hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Cleaver, if I were to tell you that I also went to the dance under false colours, that instead of being a Society girl I am merely an overworked dressmaker, hardly able to live decently, what would you say to me, then?"

"I could say to you, Miss Chalmers, what must have remained hidden for ever otherwise, that I love you!"

"And, because you are a valet, Mr. Cleaver, I can say that I learnt in those six dances to care for you very much indeed."

The remainder of the conversation which passed between these young people on the day in question, is strictly private and confidential. As they strolled arm-in-arm from the Gardens, the crisp, winter sunshine came forth, and the vista of happiness before seemed very bright indeed.

"Reggie, did you ever guess before I confessed, that I was not a lady?"

"I shall always refuse to think you anything but a lady, Meg, but when a fellow in evening-dress chases a cab containing a runaway girl, to a modest district over the water I, pretty well thought——"

"Yes?"

"Well, I thought there might be a little chance of a happy new year for me, after all!"

Harry J. Robinson.

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BRAND NEW COMPETITION. Start To-day.

Cash Down. *Cash Down.* *Cash Down.*

1st Prize, £50. 2nd Prize, £25. 3rd Prize, £10.

And 25 Gramophones.

THIS IS AN ENTIRELY NEW COMPETITION AND IS NOW PLACED BEFORE THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT IS EXCEEDINGLY SIMPLE, AND IS OPEN TO EVERY PERSON WHO READS "SHORT STORIES."

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below will be found six paragraphs containing the buried names of Railway Stations in the United Kingdom (or words that sound the same as the names). You must write in the spaces given the names of the Railway Stations so indicated.

No word or part of a word may be used more than once in making up the name of a Railway Station. In the event of the name of a Railway Station occurring more than once in a sentence, it should be underlined and written down each time. In case of more than one person finding the same number of words for each or any sentence, those words containing the largest number of letters will have preference.

When you have discovered the names of Railway Stations in the sentences, underline (in ink) the words which go to make up the names (or words that sound the same as the names) and then on the line underneath each sentence write (in ink) the correct names of the Railway Stations to be found in each.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to *Bradshaw's Guide*, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or Room Eight, SHORT STORIES, 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The names of the Railway Stations consist of one word or two or more consecutive words, or consecutive parts of one word, or two or more consecutive words.

The first prize of £50 will be given to the Competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated.

The second prize of £25 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in the order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, cut out the list below and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in SHORT STORIES. A fourth list of sentences will appear next week.

In the event of a tie a further list (or, if necessary, several further lists) of sentences will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

CUT THROUGH HERE

EXAMPLE.

The oaks were swaying in the breeze, the cows were grazing peacefully, when out of the park tore a huge black bull.

The Oaks, Sway, Cowes, Grays, Park, Black Bull.

THIRD LIST.

13. The vessel which was floated in the New River would carry considerably more than its present cargo.

14. They fell over the cliff when staying at the sea-side, though warned to look out for the spot which had been a danger to numberless people.

15. We went to the church down in the valley. It was on the border of three counties, was surrounded by a privet fence, and approached by a bridge.

16. There was a large rookery in the grounds of the County School. One boy left owing to the noise the birds made.

17. He made the horse leap a high gate. It then tore across hills and dales until it was exhausted.

18. That table-cover would make twenty mufflers for the crew of the brig which is lying at Swansea now.

NAME _____ **ADDRESS** _____

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GREAT NEW SERIES. YOU CAN BEGIN HERE.

Confessions of a Self-made Girl

The writer of these Confessions relates in this series of articles the true story of her life, from the time when she left Cornwall, an unsophisticated but ambitious girl, until she made her name and fortune. Her name is well known to you.

[*For the purposes of these Confessions I am calling myself Maud Cardew, as my real name is too well known for me to wish to make the story of my life public in this manner.*]

MY HEART'S DESIRE.

I am a native of a seaside village in Cornwall. As I grew up I began to tire of the monotony of the life and determined to go out into the world and make a name for myself.

One day when I was in the ruins of the Old Keep, which is on the cliffs, two strangers—tourists evidently—suddenly appeared. They told me that they had decided to stay in the neighbourhood for a few days, and asked if I knew of any lodgings. I said that my father would be glad to put them up at the farm, and accordingly they came home with me.

Their names were the Honourable Robert Lestrange (commonly called Bobbie) and Di Northcote.

I told these two Londoners of my desire to see the world, Bobbie encouraged me in my ambitions, but Di advised me to stay at home. When he saw that nothing would shake me from my resolve, he promised to try to find something for me to do when I arrived in the great city.

Bobbie met me on my arrival in London. Owing to a fog we got separated, and as I stood on the steps of a house I heard a man's voice asking me to come inside and wait until the fog cleared. Feeling that it would be hopeless to find Bobbie, I accepted the invitation. I remained there some time when Di happened to call, and he took me to my lodgings in Bloomsbury, where Bobbie was waiting; he told me that the man in whose rooms I had been was Lord Cecil Trevor, one of the worst "men about town."

Di came in next morning to tell me he had found me a place as trier-on in the firm of Philips and Philips, mantle and jacket makers. He also gave me some advice which I rather resented. I didn't like my work at all, and as I felt I ought not to live alone I got Lizzie Brown, a new girl, to share rooms with me.

I met Lord Cecil Trevor on several occasions, and Di and I fell out because of my friendship with him. I accepted an engagement for a small part on the stage at the suggestion of Lord Cecil. Soon afterwards we became engaged to be married. We were dining in a restaurant one evening when a woman, who had been eyeing us a good deal, came up and said:

"You can't marry Lord Cecil. He is a married man!"

The Story of Lord Cecil's Wife.

For a moment I was struck dumb with amazement, and could only stare at her stupidly.

"A married man!" I gasped at last, while the room and the people in it grew unsteady to my eyes. "Do you mean that he has a wife living?"

"Yes. She sits before you now!"

"You?" I asked incredulously, conscious for the moment only of her shabby attire and unmistakably gipsy-like appearance.

"Yes," she answered firmly, "I am Lady Cecil Trevor."

Then Lord Cecil broke in angrily.

"This is a positive farce," he said. "You Lady Cecil Trevor, indeed! Come, Maud, let us go away; it is evident no one here has the pluck to give her in charge!"

The girl looked round coolly at the collection of people now watching us breathlessly, and then turning to me, said—

"Ask for a private room if you like, but don't go away with him. He will only tell you lie upon lie."

I looked from one to the other in distress, almost wishing that the floor would open and swallow me.

"Nonsense!" Lord Cecil exclaimed. "I can't allow it, Maud. You must come away with me at once!"

"If you do," said the girl, "I will follow you and proclaim what I have to say in the street."

Again I looked up in bewilderment, utterly at a loss what to do, and almost at the same moment Di's quiet voice said—

"Can I be of any service to you?"

Where he sprang from I do not know, but there he was sure enough.

I glanced at Lord Cecil and saw a scowl of malignant hatred come over his face, but I had quickly regained my self-possession under the instant feeling of security in Di's presence, and said—

"This girl wishes to tell me something. Will you procure a private room and come with us?"

Lord Cecil remonstrated vehemently, but it was no use, and finally he had to follow the three of us.

Then the girl drew a paper from her pocket, carefully guarding it, and, handing it to Di Northcote, said—

"What does that tell you?"

Di read it through in silence and then returned it to her.

"Tell the lady," said the girl, and Di turned to me.

"It states," he said, "that Cecil Trevor went through a ceremony of marriage with Rose Whitehead four years ago in Berlin."

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"I am glad you said a ceremony," put in Lord Cecil sneeringly. "Ask her to show her marriage certificate!"

"You blackguard!" said Di, with cutting deliberation, and the look Lord Cecil threw at him made me shudder.

"Certificate or no certificate," Di continued unmoved. "This woman is undoubtedly your wife."

"And I say she is not!" he asserted.

The girl laughed, a hard, hopeless laugh that rang in my ears for weeks.

"Oh, he will go on swearing that!" she said. "He would swear his soul away if it suited him. I don't mind, I've had quite enough of him, and as long as I'm well I can earn enough for me and the children. Two there are," she added, "the youngest is nearly two years old, and he's never set eyes on her, nor given a farthing towards her keep!"

I recoiled in horror, while Lord Cecil swore at her under his breath.

"I have many friends," she went on, in a queenly way natural to her, "and I can get along just as well without him, but I have sworn to myself that as long as I live and have the power, I will stand between him and any other woman he would make a victim of."

She turned to me.

"I am of gipsy blood," she said, "but only through my mother, and I have never followed the caravan. Still, the tribe acknowledges me, and partly through this I am here to-night.

"Our ways are not your ways, but we hang together and help each other in all things. I have no more to say. You will take the lady home?" looking at Di, "and I shall vanish again till I am once more needed."

She turned to the door without so much as a glance at Lord Cecil, and with that calm simplicity of purpose that made it impossible for us to doubt her story.

"Wait a moment," said Di, and taking out his pocket-book drew from it a five-pound note.

But she shook her head. "We can do without money," she said proudly, "while we can work."

"For the children," he said simply, and her face changed. She seemed to hesitate, as if torn between conflicting desires, and finally, with a little, sad smile, held out her hand.

"For the children," she repeated slowly, and, taking the bank-note, bowed her head and vanished. As Di handed it to her, he handed with it one of his cards, and on it he had scribbled, "If you are ever in need come to me—for the children's sake," but this I learnt long afterwards.

Meanwhile Cecil Trevor had turned his back upon us, and now stood scowling up at a picture.

As Di and I were about to leave the room, I turned back and looked at him, and, as though led to it by some unseen force, he at the same moment turned to me. I don't know what possessed me, but after a moment's hesitation I said to Di—"Will you wait for me outside. I should like to speak to Lord Cecil alone."

Di did not half like it, but he could not very well do other than comply, and in a few seconds we two were alone in the room.

"Well," he said, "do you want to taunt me?"

"No," I answered, steadying my voice with an effort. "I want to say a word for that poor girl and her children!" I stepped near, and supported myself with a chair back, for the past scene had unnerved me.

"What has passed between you and me, and the wrong you meant to do me, need not come into the question now," I said. "What matters most is your treatment of her."

His face took a sullen expression, but I refused to be daunted and went on.

"Whether you are properly married or not I do not know, but it is certain you went through some form with her which she believed the right one. If it was not, marry her now," and I leant towards him pleadingly in my earnestness.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "I was a boy at the time and did not know what I was doing. Now I am a man I refuse to tie a mill-stone round my neck."

"I think it will be there whether you wish it or not," I said. "You owe this girl a name and a position. She is beautiful still, make her Lady Cecil Trevor, and perhaps you will drop the mill-stone, instead of binding it firmer."

"It is impossible!" he said again. "I do not love her, and I will not be tied to her. It doesn't affect me as you seem to think. I tell you I don't care. I don't care for anything. When a man gets to feel about things as I do, there is no right and wrong!"

"I don't believe it," I said resolutely. "You are not so wicked as you would make out."

"Oh, yes I am," he said, with a little, harsh laugh. "Much worse, in fact." He stopped short suddenly and looked up.

"If I had met you sooner," he said, "it might have been different—I don't know—but if anyone can make a man walk straight I guess it's a woman like you. It's a pity they're so scarce.

"You are the one and only specimen it has been my lot to come across. All the rest were more or less bad, or at any rate, so weak a fellow couldn't possibly care for them except as playthings."

He paused, then added in a voice from which he could not quite stifle the feeling—

"There have been a good many times since I met you when I have been sorry about things, but it's no good now. You came too late, you see; the die was cast and the pattern could not be changed. If you had married me I should have gone straight. Now it's all up with me!"

"Oh, don't say that," I cried. "You are only a young man still."

"No," he answered brusquely, "I am an old one; years go for nothing really; it is only experience that counts. I am going now—good-bye. I have no respect for your sex—it is impossible—if you knew what I know you would understand.

"But there is this difference now, I have met one good woman. I am glad, and I shall not forget. If there were more of you it would be better for all the world. Good-bye!" And without another word he hastily left the room and went out of my life for ever.

But I do not think of him harshly. In spite of everything I am only sorry to think that there are women who so degrade themselves as to give men a bad opinion of our sex.

When I walked home with Di that evening I was very meek indeed. If he had chosen to scold me I should have taken it like a lamb.

As it was, however, he scarcely spoke at all, and I began to be afraid he was mortally offended with me and had only helped me through my recent difficulty for Bobbie's sake.

When we were nearly home, however, he remarked abruptly—"You are looking very thin; I hope you are taking care of yourself?"

"Oh, yes," I replied carelessly, "I'm quite all right." I hesitated, then added, half bitterly, with Cecil Trevor uppermost in my mind, "Of course, I know you think I'm a silly little fool, but, well—" I stopped short.

"Yes?" he said encouragingly.

"No, I won't defend myself," I continued resolutely, "I *was*

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a silly little fool, only I think it was the illness that did it."

"Have you been ill?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, I had influenza, and Lord Cecil took care of me. He was awfully good."

I saw him bite his lip, but he showed no other sign as to how he felt about it.

"It must have been while I was away in France," he said. "I only returned last week, and heard of your engagement at once."

"I wonder what you thought?" I could not resist remarking.

"I did not stop to think," he replied abruptly. "I set to work at once to find some way of proving to you what kind of a man he was."

"And in the end?" I asked.

"In the end I met with his wife."

"What! You brought her!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, but I did not intend to have a public scene. I meant to bring her to you here to-night. She was too quick for me. I suppose she saw you go to the restaurant and could not wait."

We had reached my door now, and I turned to him impulsively.

"You have been good to me; let me thank you," I said; "but I cannot understand why you take all this trouble about me."

"Do you want an honest answer?" he asked.

"I do," I replied, keeping my eyes fixed on his, in spite of a quickening pulse and sudden, uncontrollable nervousness.

"Then to tell you the honest truth, I don't know," he answered. "I do not believe in any woman very deeply, and as for liking, they are all more or less the same to me. You interest me, and I would like to believe in you, but it is a question for the future to decide."

"Thank you," I replied. "I, at any rate, like an honest friend. If you are inclined to be pals again, I will try to behave better in future," and I held out my hand. I smiled a little as he shook it. "Only you mustn't be too dictatorial," I added, "because my temper wasn't built for that kind of comradeship."

Two days later Bobbie burst into my room, after three months' absence, and the old *régime* began again; that is to say, the old *régime* when Bobbie was my faithful friend and caretaker.

I remained on the stage, but with another, and far better, company, through Di's influence, and the past miserable weeks became like a bad dream.

Looking back now, I think the three months that followed my unfortunate experience with Cecil Trevor were the happiest I remember.

I was so pleased with my new part, small though it was, and with the new order, that my ambitions were lulled to rest for a little, and I gave myself up to enjoyment pure and simple. In this Di only played a very insignificant part.

Beyond helping me when I needed help, he seemed indisposed to have anything more to do with me, and kept out of my way.

I did not feel flattered by any means, but I nursed my determination to make him *feel* some day, and banished him as far as possible from my mind. Indeed it was not difficult, for Flip Harcourt was back in London also, and he and Bobbie between them gave me little enough time to think.

We went about a great deal, in a quiet way, and were more like three happy children than anything.

Then Flip was ordered off to India, and a gloom fell upon us. We did not know what it was—he had been crazy to go a few weeks before—but now everything seemed different.

The last evening but one he fetched me from the theatre, and as Bobbie was engaged at home, we were alone.

He was so quiet that I felt vaguely uncomfortable, and at last it all came out.

Well, I have no mind to tell you just what that dear boy said to me, but no woman need want a sweeter or a truer wooing. When we said "Good-bye," I could not see anything for the tears in my eyes, and I could hardly find voice to speak. I wished so much it had not ended so. I tried to say it, but he interrupted me.

"No, don't wish that," he said. "I would not have an hour different, except you loved me. I shall not forget what splendid times we have had, and from first to last there is not a word or action of yours that anyone could blame.

"I'm glad I'm going out to India though," he ran on, with a catch in his voice; "many poor chaps would have had to stick on here, and grin and bear it. I couldn't do that anyhow, and I'd sooner go to the war than anything."

He broke down a moment then.

"I hope I'll get a bullet through me," he finished, "and die in the firing line."

Ah, poor Flip, poor Flip! and you had your wish dear, only it wasn't merely in the firing line, but winning the Victoria Cross. And I have got the little keepsake you meant for me.

They found it in your breast pocket, with two notes I had scribbled to you, a little curl of hair, and a tiny lace handkerchief marked with my name. I wonder when you stole that little curl, Flip? I wonder if you kissed it sometimes? I wish—oh, I wish I could have given you all you wanted.

Soon after Flip had sailed a new order again commenced for me, and the whirlwind of circumstances swept me forward.

It dated from a certain night when I was so late for the theatre that I jumped into a hansom, and told the man to drive fast. He was practically drunk I soon discovered from the giddy way in which he swerved round corners and across the road, but I had no time to change, so held my seat and hoped for the best.

We reached the theatre safely, but the roads were greasy, and in drawing up sharply the poor horse lost his footing and fell heavily.

I was out in a second to find the driver had shot down from his seat head first, and being quite incapable of picking himself up, remained stupidly on the ground, not much better off than the poor horse.

No one was at hand except a few children, the stage door being in a back street, and everyone else, no doubt, busy in their dressing-rooms.

"Fetch someone quickly," I exclaimed to the biggest child, and went at once to the horse. The poor beast had got nastily twisted, and I could see was in pain, so I set to work at once to unbuckle what harness I could get at.

He kicked a little, but I was not afraid, having had a good deal to do with horses on my father's farm, and just then a big man, who had apparently seen all that passed, came out of the theatre door to help. Before anyone arrived we got the animal free, and coaxed him to his feet, then I looked round anxiously.

"I am horribly late," I said, "and the man is quite incapable. Someone ought to give him in charge."

My companion, who had been watching me more or less closely ever since he came to the rescue, at once signified his willingness to stay, and with a hurried thanks I fled to my dressing-room and thought no more about the incident.

Two days later, much to my surprise, I received a request to present myself at the manager's office in the afternoon at three o'clock.

Hoping I was not in disgrace about anything, but I must

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confess a little anxiously, I called at the appointed time and was at once ushered into the formidable presence.

A big man, standing at the window, turned as I entered, and while he surveyed me with a quick, keen scrutiny, I recognised my helper of the cab difficulty.

The manager introduced him to me as Mr. Gregory, and after the usual greetings he went on to tell me that he was the manager of a large theatre in New York; that he was going to produce a very successful American play in England, and that his leading lady had just met with a serious accident, and could not fulfil her engagement.

Further that Mr. Gregory had been much struck by my appearance, and my promptness over the cab disaster, and later, by the way in which I played my little part.

Finally that he wished to enter into negotiations with me, with a view to my taking the part of the leading lady in his new play.

I was so astonished at first that I literally gasped. He seemed amused at this, and I conceived a liking for him at once, which only increased steadily throughout our intercourse.

"I am not at all satisfied with Miss Weldon's understudy," he said, "and I have been going the round of the theatres in search of an actress to play the part instead of her. If you will take it home and study it carefully, I should be glad to see you again to-morrow."

The part proved a delightful one, and I am quite sure it will remain my favourite to the last, just as it will doubtless be the one with which my name is chiefly remembered. When I saw Mr. Gregory the next morning I told him at once that I knew I could play it, and my frankness pleased him.

"Confidence in yourself is often half the battle," he said. "I have not the least hesitation is giving you a trial. I have had a talk with Mr. Grange, and he is willing to release you from your engagement with him, to free you to prepare for the rehearsals at once."

When I left the theatre that time I went straight to a telegraph office and wired to Bobbie. I felt as if fame had dropped upon me from the skies, and I must do something out of the ordinary to give vent to my wild, inward elation. He, as I anticipated, was scarcely less excited than I, and ready for anything.

In the end we took stalls at a theatre, and dined at the Carlton. I remember that evening so well. Already I saw myself one of the great actresses of the day, and I'm sure I carried my head an inch higher than I had ever done before.

A new consciousness of beauty and power came to me, and as I met on all sides the usual admiring glances, I felt my heart swell with a new intensity of the joy of being and doing. Bobbie scarcely took his eyes off me.

"I did not think you could look lovelier than I have already seen you," he said; "and yet to-night there is something altogether fresh about you—something that even makes you more beautiful. What is it—you witch? Are you going to have the eyes of all the world upon you, and not be content any longer with poor Bobbie?"

A little later, digging his hands deep in his pockets, and staring moodily at the drop curtain, he remarked:

"I believe I'm beginning to wish old Gregory and his blessed new play at the bottom of the sea."

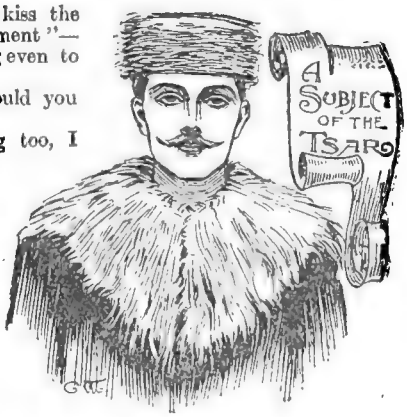
I tried to rally him. "Why?" I asked; "I expected you to be more glad than anyone."

"Then you shouldn't expect anything of the kind," he grumbled. "Good Heavens, Queenie!—am I likely to be glad about anything that robs me of you?"

"Robs you of me?" I repeated vaguely; "whatever are you dreaming of, Bobbie? I'm not going to die young that I know of."

"I know what I'm dreaming of well enough"—in the same disconsolate voice—"I'm seeing a picture of you at the top of the tree, dropping a few favours here and there with great condescension, among a small army of the human species in male attire, grovelling on their knees at your feet."

"Looking for ping-pong balls?" I asked irrelevantly.



"No, trying to kiss the hem of your garment"—not condescending even to smile.

"And where would you be?" I asked.

"Oh, grovelling too, I suppose — unless —unless——"

"Unless you were occupied with some other fair lady?" I inquired, smiling.

"No, unless I was on your right hand as your king, just as you are my queen."

"Oh, Bobbie! Bobbie!" I moaned; "*please* don't get sentimental."

"I can't help it," he said; "I'm madly in love with you, and I'm so beastly afraid all this success will come between us."

I laughed uneasily.

"You really are talking arrant nonsense, Bobbie," I asserted; "I don't know what's happened to you."

"I'm in deadly earnest, anyhow," he said; "right down, thundering, deadly earnest.

"But what about? I don't know what you're driving at."

"Then you're as dense as you are beautiful," he answered; "any girl with the ordinary amount of commonsense, in your place, would know that I wanted to marry her."

For a moment I was taken aback. It was the first time, in anything beyond the most palpable jesting, that Bobbie had spoken to me of love, and naturally I had taken it for granted all our intercourse and familiarity were more or less of a jesting nature.

We were pals pure and simple, and I was always prepared for Bobbie, one day, to confide to me the name of some fine lady he had chosen to be his bride.

Now I could hardly believe my own ears.

"Look here, Queenie," he remarked suddenly, before I had time to say anything; "I hate sentimentality as much as you do; let's be very businesslike. I want you to marry me—of course I do—I have done so for months—and I don't see that there's any reason why you can't. Let's fix it up next week."

"But my dear Bobbie!" I gasped; "what on earth are you going to do with me when you have married me?"

"Well, I didn't think of beating you just yet," he remarked drily.

I was silent a few moments, then I turned to him earnestly.

"No, don't be in earnest, Bobbie," I pleaded, "I like you so much, frivolous and irresponsible, I don't want you ever to be different. We've had such lovely times together—do let us go on just the same."

"No," he said resolutely, "I won't. I tell you I am in deadly earnest, and I intend to remain so. But it's not going to make any difference to the fun. We'll go on just the same, only I shall ask you periodically—in halfpenny numbers, don't you know, to be my wife; and if you don't give way for any other reason, you probably will in the end for peace and quietness."

He spoke half-jestingly, but his face was very white and determined, and I was frightened, for I knew perfectly well I should never marry him.

I felt I must convince him of this at once. I waited until we were going home, however, and then returned to the charge.

"Do you see this picture, Bobbie?" I said, glancing up at it; "it is a bit of Cornwall, and a bit of me. Those cliffs are drawn from life—they are some of the wildest and grandest in England. There is not much shadow of turning about them, is there? Not much wavering or giving up? It doesn't

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matter how fierce the sea, nor how wild the elements, they just brave them steadily, like adamantine walls."

I went and stood in front of him, stirred to my innermost being by my own strong feelings.

"I was born beside them, Bobbie," I said; "they are some of the first objects I ever remember opening my baby eyes upon; my small brain was almost reared upon thoughts of them. Whatever came and went, whatever befell, those giant cliffs frowned serenely on—steadfast, immutable, sublime.

"They caught my fancy before anything else, and have held it ever since—whatever I own of steadfastness, or resolute purpose, I feel I owe to them.

"Bobbie, just think it out a moment—nothing but an earthquake will make those cliffs change their purpose of holding back the sea. And I drank in the spirit of them, from my earliest infancy!

"Do you understand, Bobbie?—nothing but a miracle will change me now from my set purpose.

"I own a few weeks ago I wavered, but it was largely ill-health and a terrible depression. It is gone now and I am stronger than ever."

I stopped suddenly with a little laugh.

"How I am ranting, Bobbie," I said apologetically; "you must think I've gone off my head.

"But you understand, don't you? By going to the top I don't really mean the top of the theatrical profession—I mean a higher level still—I want to be a peeress, and since I can only become so by marriage, it is evident that I cannot marry you."

He got up then and strode down the room, kicking angrily at anything that came in his way.

"Drivel!" he said, coming back; "pure schoolgirl, mawkish drivel—I'm more than surprised at you—I'm—I'm—disgusted!"

I made no reply, and presently he added—"It's so beastly commonplace, too—every silly fool wants to be a duchess, and Heaven knows!—it's a poor enough game at best. You'll be sick of it in a year, I'll lay a quid. If your precious duke drinks and gambles you'll wish yourself at the bottom of the sea."

"I don't think he'll do that," I said quietly; "I'm not such a fool as you seem to think. I'll take that bet, Bobbie, just register it in your pocket-book.

"Only don't go on thinking about marrying me, because it can never be. I don't believe I could, even if I wanted to—my will wouldn't let me."

He came up to me and put his hands on my shoulders.

"I've got a will, too, Queenie," he said; "we'll just let the two of them fight it out to the end. Whichever way Fortune turns, I am your slave to the last, don't forget that."

(Next Tuesday I will tell you of my first appearance in a leading theatrical part.)

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

THE FALCON.

An Italian Story of Love and Sacrifice.

In Florence there was once a young man named Federigo, son of Master Filippo Alberighi, esteemed in feats of arms and in courtesy above every other young lord in Tuscany. Once upon a time, as usually befalls gallant men, he fell in love with a noble lady called Mistress Giovanna, in her day ranked among the fairest and most charming women of Florence; and to win her love he jousted and fought, gave feasts and made gifts, and lavished his wealth without measure or check.

But she, no less honourable than beautiful, took no notice of those things done for her, or of him who did them.

As Federigo then spent far beyond his means and gained nothing, it easily follows that his riches came to an end, and he remained poor. There was nothing left him but a little farm of his, on the income from which he lived wretchedly, and besides this a falcon, one of the best in the world.

And so, more in love than ever, and seeing it beyond his power to live in the city as he longed to do, he went to dwell at Campi, where his farm was. Here flying his falcon when he could, and asking no man's help, patiently he endured his poverty.

Now it happened one day, after Federigo had thus come to grief, that Mistress Giovanna's husband fell sick, and seeing death near, made his will. In this, being wealthy, he made his son, a sturdy little fellow, his heir, and then, because he had greatly loved Mistress Giovanna, provided that all should pass to her if the son died without lawful issue; and he died.

Mistress Giovanna, thus left a widow, went in the summer, as the ladies are wont to do, into the country with her son to an estate of hers not far from Federigo's.

So it came about that this lad began to grow intimate with Federigo and to take delight in birds and dogs; and having often seen Federigo's falcon fly he liked it hugely and mightily longed to own it, yet was unwilling to ask for it, seeing it was so dear to its master.

While matters stood thus it happened that the boy fell ill.

His mother, greatly afflicted by this, since she had no one else and loved him with all her heart, remained near him all day long, never ceased comforting him, and often asked him if there were anything he wished, begging him to tell her, for if it were possible to obtain it she would surely see that he had it.

The boy, after hearing these offers many times, said:

"Mother, dear, if you will get me Federigo's falcon I believe I shall get well soon."

When the lady heard this she remained quiet for awhile, and began to think what she ought to do.

She knew that Federigo had long loved her, and had never had from her a single look, so she said:

"How shall I send or go to ask him for this falcon, which, from what I hear, is the best that ever flew, and besides is all that keeps him alive? And how can I be so heartless as to wish to take from a man the last joy that is left him?"

And embarrassed by such thoughts, as she was perfectly sure she would get it, if she asked for it, she did not answer her son, but was silent, not knowing what to say.

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At last, love of the child so overpowered her that in order to satisfy him, she determined that, whatever came of it, she would not send but would go herself for the bird and bring it to him; and she answered him:

"Cheer up, my boy, and make up your mind to get well, for I promise you that the first thing I do to-morrow morning I shall go for it and surely bring it to you."

The child, happy in that thought, seemed to grow better the same day.

The next morning, accompanied by a friend, the lady went for a walk to Federigo's cottage and asked for him. Because the weather was not suitable for flying his falcon he was in a field of his, overseeing certain tasks.

Hearing that Mistress Giovanna was at the door asking for him he was greatly astonished, and ran there joyfully. When she saw him approach she rose to meet him with a womanly charm of manner, and when Federigo had courteously greeted her, she said:

"Good morning, Federigo," and went on, "I have come to make amends to you for the harm you have received through me, loving me more than you should have done; and the compensation is this, that I mean, with my companion here, to breakfast with you in friendly fashion this morning."

Federigo humbly answered her:

"My lady, no harm do I remember ever to have received through you, but rather so much good that if I was ever of any account it was through your worth and through the love I bore you. And surely your generous coming to me now is much dearer to me than it would be if I had the power to spend again as much as I have spent in the past, since you have become a poor man's guest."

And so saying he received her shamefacedly into his house and from there took her into the garden, and having no one else there to entertain her, he said:

"My lady, since there is no one else this good woman, the farmer's wife, will keep you company while I go and have the table set."

Although his poverty was extreme, he had not yet learnt as he ought to have done that he had foolishly spent his wealth.

But this morning, finding nothing with which he could feast that lady, for love of whom he had before feasted countless men, made him think; and, afflicted beyond measure, he reviled his luck, like a man out of his senses, running this way and that, finding neither money nor a thing that might be pawned.

When it was already late and he was eager to honour the fair lady with something at least, and unwilling to ask of anyone, even his own father, he happened to catch sight of his good falcon upon its perch.

And so, having nothing else to turn to, he took it, and, finding it plump, he decided that it was worthy food for such a lady. Therefore, without more thought, he wrung its neck and had his maid-servant dress it and put it before the fire and roast it carefully; and having spread the table with white cloths, of which he still had a few, he returned gaily to the lady in the garden and said that such breakfast as he could furnish was ready.

The lady, with her companion, rose and went to the table, and, without knowing what they were eating, together with Federigo, who served them faithfully, they ate up the poor falcon.

When they had risen from the table and lingered awhile in pleasant conversation with him, it seemed to the lady time to say what she had come for, so with a friendly manner towards Federigo, she began:

"Federigo, when you recall your past life and my regard for my honour, which perhaps you considered harshness and cruelty, I have no doubt that you must wonder at my presumption when you hear the principal reason why I come. But if you had children, or had had any, through whom you might know the power of love for them, I should be certain that you would partially excuse me.

"But although you have no child I, who have one, cannot escape the laws which govern other mothers; and as I must yield to their force, without any regard to my pleasure or to the proprieties, I am constrained to ask of you a gift which I know is precious to you—and rightly so, for your evil fortune has left you no other delight, no other diversion, no other comfort. This gift is your falcon, of which my boy is so fond, that if I do not take it to him I am afraid he will grow so much worse that I shall lose him.

"Therefore, I beg you, not by the love you have for me, which places you under no obligations, but by your noble nature, which seems to make you more courteous than anyone else, consent to give me the bird. Then I may say that by this gift I have kept my son alive and so placed him under eternal obligations to you."

Federigo, hearing what the lady asked, and regretting that he could not serve her, because he had given it to her to eat, began to weep before he could answer a word.

The lady at first believed that this weeping came more from grief at having to give up the good falcon than from anything else; and she was almost on the point of saying that she did not wish it, but she checked herself and waited for Federigo's answer, which came, after many tears:

"My lady, since the time when by God's will I gave you my love I have found Fortune hostile to me in many things, and have complained of her; but all those things were nothing in comparison with what she is doing to me now—a thing for which I shall never forgive her, when I think that you have come here to my poor house, where you never deigned to come when it was a rich one, and you seek from me a little gift, and Fortune has so contrived that I cannot give it to you; and I shall tell you briefly why this cannot be.

"When I heard that you—and I thank you for it—wished to breakfast with me, I considered it fit and proper, with regard to your rank and your worth, to honour you with more precious food, so far as lay in my power, than those viands which are generally used for other persons.

"So, when I thought of the falcon which you now ask me for, and of his value, I judged him to be fit food for you, and this morning you have had him roasted upon the platter, and I thought that was an excellent use for him, but now when I see that you have wished for him in another way, I feel such grief because I cannot serve you, that I am sure I shall never give myself a moment's peace about it."

And saying this he had the feathers and feet and head brought forward as a proof.

When the lady saw and heard this, first she blamed him for having slain such a falcon just to give food to a woman; and then in her heart she praised highly the greatness of his soul which poverty had not been able to lessen. She went away sadly and returned to her son.

The boy, either from grief because he could not have the falcon, or from the natural progress of his sickness, not many days later, to the great grief of his mother, passed from this life. She, after giving herself up to tears and bitterness for a time, being now rich and still young, was often urged by her brothers to marry again.

Although she was reluctant, yet, seeing herself tormented by them, she remembered the noble qualities of Federigo and his last act of generosity—namely, his killing such a falcon to honour her—and she said to her brothers:

"I would rather remain a widow if you were willing; but if you still wish me to marry I shall certainly never marry again unless it be with Federigo degli Alberighi."

Her brothers in derision said:

"Stupid, what are you saying? How can you want him, when he has nothing in the world?"

She answered them:

"Brothers, I know that it is just as you say; but I want a man without wealth, rather than wealth without a man."

Her brothers, hearing her decision and knowing Federigo to be a true man, although he was poor, gave her to him with all her wealth as she desired. And he, finding himself the husband of a lady so beautiful and whom he had so much loved, and besides that being now wealthy, became a careful manager and spent the rest of his life with her in perfect joy.

F. A. Sturt

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ONLY A WEDDING CARD!

A Love Story with a Sad Ending.

LIGHT of heart, plain even to homeliness, large-nosed, thin-cheeked, square-jawed, with his long limbs hanging loosely to his body, laughing at all hours and places and things, happy apparently from morning to night, and entirely free from business cares and worries, Richard Morrison surely took life as easily as any man in or out of Workingham.

Those jealous of his disposition said he was too well satisfied with himself to be in earnest, and that he was wearisome; but the power he showed at entertaining women and children by the hour, without eliciting a yawn or a depressing lot of condescending monosyllables, would seem to prove him quite the opposite.

A capital dancer and a thorough society-man so far as frothy remarks and subtle flattery went, he found a welcome everywhere, and was considered as indispensable at dances and card-parties as the refreshments themselves. Indeed, some of the lately-opened buds had been heard to remark that he was even more enjoyable than ices and bonbons. But they had not known Dick very long.

If he had been handsome or very wealthy, he would have fallen into some designing mother's hands and have been turned into a benedict; but as his income was only modestly large, and as his face, as inelegantly described by his best friend, Hartman Lawson, would eventually hang him, light-hearted Dick still remained a bachelor, and every indication pointed to his finally filling—I quote Mr. Lawson once more—a bachelor's grave.

Dick had two peculiarities: he did not drink, and he fell in love ever so often. The first, in such a town as Workingham, stamped him as a different being from the rest of mankind; the second made him interesting to every woman he knew.

All the way through the upper, middle, and lower strata of society in and about Workingham Dick penetrated, loving as freely and as often as he laughed, happy and miserable as regularly as he was thrown over or quietly "forgotten," but believing through it all that he would find a girl at last who would care for him enough to marry him and help spend his small income.

* * * * *

"Come in," said Hartman, in answer to a nervous knock on his door one evening.

As the door opened he looked up from under the lamp to see who it is, and his eyes met those of Dick.

"That you, Richard? Take a chair," and he politely kicked one towards his visitor.

"I haven't time to stay," Dick explained, as Hartman pointed silently to the tobacco-jar and array of pipes on the mantel-piece. "I am packing. Eh? Yes, going away."

"Ah," said his friend, finishing a paragraph in his novel and turning it face down on his knees. "Where?"

"Goatstone. I don't suppose you know it, but——" He stopped and going to the door closed it carefully, then he came to his friend's side and rolled up one of his loose sleeves.

"Look at that," he said, bringing his bare arm into the soft light of the shaded lamp. Lawson put on his eye-glasses and looked down at the member; touched the little callous spots which almost covered the forearm, with a gentle thumb and finger; and pursed his lips.

"Too bad, old man!" he said; "how long?"

"A year or more. I first began taking the stuff that time I was so ill and when I couldn't sleep—you'll remember that, because you used to suffer from my everlasting walking up and down the room. I thought it would go away—the desire for it—but I was decidedly mistaken. It's got me fast, and it will end me if I don't end it."

"Sit down," said the other, quietly motioning to the chair again with his pipe, "and tell me all about it."

"Precious little to tell," replied the younger man, the laughter missing from his voice and homely face now. "The fool of a doctor gave it to me in the first place, and hadn't sense enough to warn me about it. You see, I wouldn't know that the thing becomes a habit unless someone told me so every now and then, and he didn't even mention it once—at least, not more than once, anyway.

"It ran on without worrying me till a month or so ago, when I forgot to get some tablets one night. I suffered horrors for twelve hours—not only physically, but mentally; for it was the first time I had realised what a hold the morphine had on me. At daybreak, I got round to the chemist and roused him up, and so slept all the day. But at night I began to make a stand against the stuff, and no one knows how hard I tried to overcome the need for it.

"I walked all night, up and down the streets, fighting every step of the way against the awful appetite for my poison; and when dawn came again, I thought I had conquered, but it fooled me. The minute I got home, I rushed for the syringe, and not ten thousand devils or saints could have kept me from it, though I tried with all the power left in me to stop.

"Yes, it is all up with me. I can't stop it myself, so I'm going to Dr. Harper. It's the only way. What I came to ask you to do for me is to throw the fellows off the track, if they come asking you questions. If they find I have gone to the doctor's hospital, they'll swear it's the D.T.'s; and you know yourself it isn't that, though it is just as bad, if not worse."

Dick stopped abruptly and coloured as he realised what a long speech, for him, he had been making.

"I understand; you want me to put the boys off when they ask me where you are. How long will you be gone?"

"They claim they can cure a man in three weeks; but I'll be there a month. I don't want any half-way business in mine, and this once must be the first and last time I go there. You will do this for me?"

"Of course, old man. You are doing right to go before

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it is too late, and I certainly hope you'll come out of it all right. But, Dick——"

"Well?"

"I knew it long ago."

"You did? How?"

"Never mind. Only I wanted to tell you that I had an eye on you, and I was thinking to-night of opening the subject with you. Just another case of coincidence."

"Yes. Well, I'm much obliged to you for thinking of me, and I'll be more so if you keep the boys out of the way. I'll be off now; start at seven in the morning, so I won't see you. Take a look in my rooms every now and then, old man, and make yourself at home whenever you feel like it. I'll leave a key for you. I—— Good night," and he held out his hand.

Hartman shook it heartily, and Dick was at the door before he spoke.

"Richard!"

"Well?" again.

"Hadn't you better tell me the rest?"

"The rest?"

"The rest."

"How did you know there was any rest, Hartman?"

Hartman smiled. "Anyone could have told that," he said. "Go on; has she promised to wait until you are—well again?"

"No," said Richard eagerly, the look of hope and love which his friend had seen so often coming into his eyes once more. "I wouldn't let her do that. She started to say something, and there were tears in her eyes, bless her, but I would not stay. I told her everything.

"First I told her how much I loved her"—Hartman smiled, but Dick went on—"and that I wouldn't want her to say she would wait for me. I told her, if I deserved her, I would have her and her love when I got back.

"I know she loves me, but I couldn't stand hearing her say so; it would have broken me up so I wouldn't have been willing to start to-morrow. So, as quick as I got through telling her my plan, and before she could say a word, though she tried, I got away and came home."

"But are you sure of yourself this time?" asked Hartman.

"Sure of myself? I wish I were as sure of Heaven as I am of myself! I love that girl, Hartman, with everything—heart, soul, and body—and I mean to have her in the end, if honest working for her will count. I don't want you to tell me a word about her while I am gone, and she isn't to write to me, because I haven't strength of mind to stay away from her when I think or hear of her too much. When I come back, I'll tell you the rest—all of it."

"That's a good plan; you are right not to make a regular engagement of it, old man; it is more fair to both of you. But are you in earnest this time, Dick?"

"Now, ook here, Hartman," exclaimed his friend impatiently, "every man is in earnest once in his life, even if he is of no account as I am, isn't he? Well, I tell you, this is my earnest time, and no mistake about it. I'm going to prove it to you. Good night," and he was gone before Hartman could even ask him her name.

As Dick's own door closed behind him, Hartman took from his pocket a tiny photograph—the picture of an exceedingly pretty girl. He smiled at the winsome face, and then kissed it once or twice. He was usually a hard, practical man, but very few of us are not foolish once in a while.

One day, about a month after, Dick, free from his trouble and looking much more like the Dick of twelve months ago, came quietly home.

He had not told Hartman even that he would be back that day, and he met no intimate friends as he went to his rooms in the quiet little street. In an hour he was settled as comfortably as ever, and all the afternoon he was answering letters that had come while he had been gone.

After dinner he went for a short walk; and, as he ran down the steps and drew in a breath of the fresh Spring air, he felt that his cup of happiness was almost full. and that soon the tortures he had suffered—hidden under his accustomed gaiety, though none the less deep on that account—would be repaid a thousand-fold.

He started for the club; but his feet took him elsewhere, and ten minutes later he was unlatching the gate at her house.

He found her at a little desk in the corner of the room, writing; and, as she rose to receive him, he saw scattered about on it innumerable envelopes which she had addressed.

She caught his inquiring glance, and a pretty colour came into her face as she laughingly handed him one of them. He opened it with a queer feeling at his heart, which was not relieved when he began to read the plain little engraved sheet within:

"Mr. and Mrs. L. S. Torence request the pleasure of your company at the marriage of their daughter Lizzie——"

Dick read no further. For a moment everything seemed to turn black around him, and he set his teeth hard to keep back the groan which rose to his lips.

But it passed quickly.

He put the card back into its envelope, and that into his pocket; then he turned to her with his old smile.

"I congratulate him, Lizzie," he said, quite steadily.

Late that night, after the theatre, Hartman ran whistling up the stairs to Dick's rooms. He had just heard that he had got back, and he had determined to drop in and scold him a bit for not notifying him, before he himself turned in.

The door was locked; but Hartman had the key he carried while Dick was away, and he put it softly in the lock, and, turning it, stepped quietly into the room.

A slight breath of air, which made the gas-jet burning near the table waver and flare up again, swept past him, laden with the odour of crushed rose-leaves, and it carried him back, as sweet odours only can carry one back into the past.

He smiled thoughtfully and looked down.

Stretched at full length before the long mirror, face downwards, was Dick himself, and the cheerful words of greeting died on Lawson's lips. He closed the door hastily, and, running forward, knelt beside him. No breath, no motion, no sound.

He turned him over slowly, and the wide-open eyes of careless Dick did not smile back into his own as they had always done. He touched his pulse with his finger, but it was still.

In one thin hand the dead man held the fragments of a small bottle which had been crushed under him as he fell; in the other, a crumpled sheet of rich paper.

Lawson took the paper gently from his cold fingers and held it under the gas. He started back when he saw what it was, for it was one of his own wedding-cards.

His hand trembled, and the paper fluttered to the floor.

"Dick!" he whispered hoarsely, touching the body with his foot and springing back in horror again at his own action. "Dick, get up! Why didn't you tell me who it was? How could I know? I did not mean —— Dick, I say! Dick! Oh, Heaven! He is dead, and I——"

He passed his hand quickly over his own white, wet face, and sank down, overcome with his feelings.

For Richard Morrison's earnest time had come—and gone!

M. E. R.

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NEW SERIAL. **START TO-DAY.**

Held Apart

The Story of a Strange Double Fraud and its Influence upon some Young Hearts, a Great Name, and a Famous Fortune.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "The Golden Dwarf," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Moira Davenal is sitting in the little cottage on Groudle Quay busy with her ribbon work. Sir Guy Vanbrugh is talking to her.

"Moira, I love you so much," he says. "Won't you——"

He pauses. There is a heavy step in the hallway of the cottage, and a burly figure enters the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Davenal. I'm off to London for the week-end and was just leaving a message for you with your daughter. How goes on the task of raising the *Sylph?*"

"I've found the last hole, Sir Guy," says John Davenal, who is a diver engaged in raising Sir Gu 's yacht. "She'll soon be afloat."

After Sir Guy has gone a sailor appears at the door singing in drunken tones the scrap of a chorus:

"*Give my love to Nancy, the girl that I adore,*
Tell her that she'll never see her—her sailor any more."

The diver rises to his feet.

"Hullo, Hartigan!" he remarks loudly. "Glad to see you. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

While Moira goes out on an errand a conversation takes place between the two men, from which it appears that Moira is really Hartigan's daughter.

The sailor—who is a ship's steward—sits back in his chair and begins to sing again the drunken chorus.

He halts abruptly, for the door slowly opens, and a blind woman comes in.

Dennis Hartigan recognises her as his sister Kate. She tells her brother that she heard the song he was singing—sung in just the same way—once when she was sitting on a breakwater at Groudle. She also adds that the man who was singing said, evidently to someone with him: "This is out far enough. In with it;" after which there was a splash.

Hannah Davenal (Hartigan's wife and the diver's sister) is maid to Lady Tarleton. She is possessed of a secret with which she continually blackmails her mistress.

One afternoon Lady Tarleton and Hannah Davenal go down to Groudle Tower, and together they make a mysterious journey at midnight.

Two mornings later Hannah is found dead in bed, a towel smelling of chloroform is on her face, and over that a pillow on which are some dirty finger marks.

The police are informed of the tragedy, and Detective Sergeant Ussher is sent from Scotland Yard to investigate the affair.

Edward Stormont, the owner of Groudle Tower, and Lady Tarleton's brother-in-law, now arrives at Groudle with his friend Paul Jerome, a war-correspondent, and the following day Irene Tarleton comes in response to her mother's summons.

Dennis Hartigan is arrested on suspicion of causing his wife's death, but is soon released. He has a mysterious conversation with Lady Tarleton regarding a child.

"If—if the child were no longer in my path," Lady Tarleton murmurs, "I would give ten thousand pounds—to the man who told me so. Think it well over."

"I will, my lady," Hartigan answers.

On his way back to Groudle Tower Hartigan encounters his sister Kate. They return by way of the level-crossing. A train is in sight, rounding the curve. Dennis leaves his blind sister standing in between the metals along which the train is coming. She is rescued just in time by Paul Jerome, who is out riding. He leaps one gate, picks Kate up, and then leaps the other gate.

After leaving Kate in safety Jerome comes up with Hartigan, and tells him that he saw all that happened, and leaves him with a warning.

Lady Tarleton discovers that her daughter is very friendly with Jerome, and takes her to task about it. She wants Irene to marry Sir Guy and does not know that they have each agreed to go their own way.

Davenal and Hartigan go for a walk on Groudle Quay, where they have a heated and rather unfriendly conversation regarding Moira. They part and Hartigan hurries on. He hides behind a fence near Davenal's cottage and when the latter comes along stabs him in the back.

Guy Vanbrugh goes down to Hawthorn Cottage to see the diver, not knowing that he has been murderously attacked. He tries to comfort Moira and takes her in his arms.

Suddenly the wicket-latch clicks, and Moira looks up. It is too late. Lady Tarleton, pausing on the threshold of Hawthorn Cottage, has glanced into the small entrance hall, and perceives none other than Sir Guy Vanbrugh with a fair and ruffled head pillowed on his breast.

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FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Guy Vanbrugh is Detected.

Blushing painfully, Moira released herself and stepped back. The new-comer put up a tortoiseshell-rimmed lorgnette, and regarded her with a penetrating stare, whose affectation of indolent disdain could not conceal its ferocity. Lady Tarleton's glance travelled to her nephew, and her lip curled in a coarse, though subtle sneer.

Guy Vanbrugh had coloured slightly. He drew himself up to the full height of an athletic five-feet ten and squared his young shoulders. A proud, if somewhat embarrassed smile flickered about his mouth. Lady Tarleton was the first to break the silence. Conspicuously ignoring Guy Vanbrugh, she addressed herself to Moira.

"I am sorry to interrupt your philanderings, my good girl," she remarked, with a brutal self-possession, "but I understand that some persons named Davenal live here. I am Lady Tarleton."

Moira retreated to the rear of the little hall.

"Will you come in, please?" she said nervously.

Guy Vanbrugh opened the inner door, Kit had gone out of the room, and the pleasant, simple apartment was empty.

"Allow me, aunt," he interpolated deftly, as Lady Tarleton swept by him, "to make you acquainted with Miss Moira Davenal. She is the daughter of my friend, John Davenal, and is to honour me by becoming something more than a friend. Moira, my aunt; aunt, my future wife."

Lady Tarleton struggled for breath—her nephew's swift, cool candour had taken her off her guard. The blush that had begun to fade from Moira's cheeks returned to them. But she looked up at Guy Vanbrugh and her eyes shone with a soft, sweet confidence in him. He had met the situation in a fashion befitting a gentleman and a loyal lover.

"This is scarcely the time," he went on calmly, "I should have chosen to take anyone, even yourself, aunt, into what has been hitherto rather a secret. But I cannot allow you, for a moment, to think that Miss Davenal would permit me to indulge in an aimless and, indeed, dishonourable flirtation."

A shrill little peal of laughter burst from Lady Tarleton's full white throat.

"Oh, my dear Guy," she exclaimed, "how picturesque you are, and how seriously one takes these things at your age. But, I assure you, I am quite discreet, and if worldly wisdom should prove in the end stronger than youthful romance, why I shall not have mentioned your—your flirtation, as you call it, to a soul."

Guy Vanbrugh forced a smile, but his expression had darkened.

"I should prefer that you had received my explanation in a less jesting spirit, aunt," he replied; "but Miss Davenal will, I hope, not need to be told that you are rather fond of banter, even of a somewhat cynical order."

Moira's nostrils contracted, and she lifted her delicate eyebrows. But otherwise she made no response to her lover's tactful observation.

"Won't you sit down, Lady Tarleton?" she suggested, and indicated, with an almost disdainful gesture, the high-backed, cushioned chair that was the diver's favourite seat; "no doubt you called upon some matter of business, my Aunt Hannah was your maid, I believe?"

Lady Tarleton put up her lorgnette once more. She was no mean judge of character, and there was a ring in the refined though girlish tones, which told her that Moira Davenal was a cultivated and intelligent woman. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Quite so," she said, sinking into the chair; "I had no idea that my visit would result in surprising so highly romantic a secret. My object, Miss Davenal, was simply to inquire after your father. Your aunt was really a most deserving person and her shocking death touched me deeply."

The speaker coughed and glanced around her with an air of supercilious toleration.

"I need not say," she continued, "how grieved I was to hear that a murderous attack had been also made on your father. The chief of the detectives, it seems, fancies there may be somebody who had a grudge against both your father and my poor Davenal. It is very sad, very."

She yawned behind her tightly-fitting slate-grey glove.

"And so," she said, "as I had to drive into Groudle for the inquest, I thought I would call and ask how your father is, and if I could do anything for you in your great trouble. I trust both yourself and my dear Guy here will forgive me my unintentional intrusion. You really made a most charming picture—quite idyllic."

Guy Vanbrugh laid a hand on Moira's brown fingers—they were resting on the edge of the plain serge tablecloth. It was as if he were seeking to fortify her against the mocking politeness of Lady Tarleton. Moira withdrew her hand. There was something in the latter's insolent regard that made her lover's caress distasteful to her.

"My father is very ill indeed, Lady Tarleton," she said, with grave courtesy; "it was kind of you to think of us. But we want for nothing, thank you very much all the same."

Lady Tarleton looked at the tiny bracelet watch on her wrist, folded her lorgnette, and rose.

"Not at all," she answered. "I hope your father may do well. And now you may show me to my carriage, Guy; it will give you an opportunity to assure me that you bear no malice."

She dropped Moira a bow of amused patronage, and took her departure. Guy Vanbrugh escorted her out of the cottage, and, notwithstanding her intimation, put her into her victoria without remark. He was silent, almost repellant. Lady Tarleton tapped him with her lorgnette.

"Guy," she murmured, "what an awful mistake you are making. You poor boy, how you will regret it one of these days. Yet there, all you men are alike where a pretty face is concerned. That is, till the gilt is off the gingerbread. However, if you should come to your senses in time, remember that I am your friend, and, especially, that I shall not breathe a word of this—to Irene."

She motioned to the footman and the victoria was whirled away before he could reply. Under cover of her parasol, Lady Tarleton glanced back, and saw that he was just entering the gate of Hawthorn Cottage.

"The fool!" she said, "the hot-headed young fool! But at least I *know*—my Lady Bountiful call has, indeed, served me better than I meant."

She relapsed into thought, playing with the thick gold ring of her parasol.

"The girl is dangerously pretty," she muttered, "and even more dangerously clever. I—I wonder who she reminds me of."

Lady Tarleton pondered irritably as the carriage rolled through the irregular, sunny streets of Groudle, to the weather-beaten, grey stucco block of public offices where was to be held the inquiry into the death of her murdered maid.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

"I Promise, Guy, Dear."

"You must forgive me blurting it out quite so theatrically, my darling, but really it was the only thing to do."

Moira turned from the window of the cottage. Sheltered by one of its looped muslin curtains, she had been watching the departure of Lady Tarleton's victoria. Guy Vanbrugh crossed the room, drew her from the casement, and put an arm about her.

"I feel as though you had really become mine, now, dear," he said; "I ought to have spoken to your father myself and at once. Nothing but vexation can spring out of secrecy in an engagement such as——" He stopped awkwardly. Moira winced.

"Such as ours," she concluded; "that was what you were going to say, wasn't it? I am beginning to feel that ours isn't the ordinary sort of—of engagement. I'm not quite sure that it is the right sort."

Guy Vanbrugh started.

"Moira!" he said; "you don't—you can't mean——"

Moira shivered.

"That woman," she answered slowly, "pities and laughs at you, and sneers at and despises me. Are all your friends going to do the same?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried her lover. "Lady Tarleton is simply a disappointed matchmaker. If she had had her way she would have married me to her daughter Irene and spoilt four lives in doing it. For if I have given you my heart, I'll be sworn Irene has given hers to Paul Jerome—a fine fellow, who, because he is merely a war-correspondent and was once a newspaper reporter, Lady T. will consider as much out of Irene's station as, in her opinion, be it understood, you are out of mine."

He put a gentle hand under her firm little chin, and compelled her to look up into his face. The tears flooded to her blue eyes.

"Moira," he said, "are you going to turn coward because a soulless, money-worshipping dowager spits at you the characteristic venom of her species? My dear child, you will have dozens of such creatures fawning on you for a dinner or a dance card as soon as you are Lady Vanbrugh. I took you for a clear-headed little woman, surely you are not going to be frightened of that arrant humbug, 'Society's verdict'?"

The strong, yet masculine fingers held her remorselessly, and Guy Vanbrugh's gaze seemed to probe the very depths of her being. She shook her head mutely—she could not speak. He was mastering her by sheer force of his fearless man's will, and she, woman like, was happy that it should be so. He stooped and kissed her, lip to lip.

"We two against the world, dear," he murmured, "for the best and rarest thing in it—true love. Swear it, my darling, or bid me go—go because you are only a weak woman and must needs yield one triumph the more to the old and evil system which sells human hearts over the golden counter of Society."

Moira buried her face on his breast, overcome by the sudden, if somewhat melodramatic, eloquence that love had lent the reserved young Englishman.

"Oh, I promise, Guy, dear," she faltered; "but if I am ever really certain that I am not making you happy, or that, after all, I am not a fit wife for you, I shall go away and hide myself where you will never, never find me."

"And where will that be?" demanded her lover gravely.

Moira choked back her emotion.

"I—I don't know," she stammered, trying to speak lightly; "but I shall know then."

Guy Vanbrugh studied her.

"You are very proud, my darling," he said, "and yet I like you for it. Well, and now that momentous question is settled, what am I going to do about rendering this engagement of ours decorously public?

"I have told Lady Tarleton, it is true, and indeed she ought to be the most suitable person to tell, yet she is scarcely likely to deal with the information in a fashion satisfactory to us. You see, I have so few women relatives; until I set eyes on you and discovered how much I liked Groudle, the Close, like the Tower, was in the hands of servants. All I did was to use it as a shooting-box."

He reflected, but Moira intervened hastily.

"Oh, please," she begged, "don't do anything, or say anything, till I can tell father. He—he will feel it terribly, my leaving him—I know he will—and I want to break it to him myself before he hears it from anyone else."

"Then we will allow matters to remain just where they are," said Guy Vanbrugh, "until Mr. Davenal gets better, or until——"

Moira checked him with an impulsive motion.

"Don't!" she gasped—"don't! I can't bear to think of that; he—he must get better—he must! Oh, why should anybody have wanted to hurt him; why would anybody want him to die?"

Guy Vanbrugh sought to comfort her.

"It is a terrible riddle, my darling," he said, "but we must hope for the best—we will hope for the best."

A footstep sounded on the staircase that gave access to the floor above, and the door from the small hall-way of the cottage whined. The lovers moved apart, and the blind girl reentered the room.

"Moira," she observed, "your father has been asking for you once or twice. He is asleep now, but nurse says if you will go and sit by him so that he can see you when he wakes, it may excite him less than having you sent for."

"Then I will not keep you another moment, Miss Davenal," said Guy Vanbrugh formally.

He stopped, remembering that it must be ten minutes or more since he had bidden farewell to Moira in the hearing of Kate Hartigan. However, there was no opening for him to an explanation, and he could not be sure that it would be advisable to volunteer one.

The blind girl impressed him as being an extremely shrewd little personage. He pressed Moira's hand, looked the adieu he did not speak, and went away abruptly, letting himself out.

The blind girl knitted her brows as the door closed behind him.

"So he didn't go," she said.

Moira replied in the negative.

"Lady Tarleton called," she added evasively—"Aunt Hannah's mistress, from the Tower, to ask if there was anything that could be done for father. Sir Guy knew her and came back with her. But she did not stay long."

"Oh," remarked Kit drily.

Moira hesitated, as if she were inclined to investigate the reason for the odd inflection of the blind girl's voice. Her hesitation terminated in inaction, so far as Kit was concerned. She stepped towards the stairs and stole noiselessly up them to reach the wounded man's chamber.

Kit opened the front door of the cottage, and, passing out into the garden, stood suddenly still. The sunbeams shone warmly upon her childish, tear-stained countenance, and the sea-breeze stirred her clustering brown curls. Kate Hartigan was a creature of the open-air, and now, after the long and sleepless night that had followed the mysterious attack upon the master of Hawthorn Cottage, she sought in it refreshment and consolation.

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As she stood there motionless in an ecstasy of sorrowful silence, the beat of iron-shod hoofs rang upon the cobblestones of the neighbouring quay. It was not the uneven clatter of the draught-horse's clumsy feet, but the quick, rhythmic walk of well-bred, well-broken animals.

The hoof-beats ceased, there was a pause, and the gate-latch clicked. Paul Jerome, giving his reins, with a laughing apology, to Irene Tarleton, had leapt from the saddle of the white hunter and entered the wooden wicket. He approached the blind girl, speaking as he came that he might not startle her.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "and how is Miss Hartigan? None the worse for her adventure at the crossing, I trust."

Kit took an impulsive step in the direction of his voice.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I am glad to see you again." The war-correspondent noticed that, from force of habit, she said the same phrase as a "sighted" person would have done.

"I happened to be riding by," he answered, observing with a new interest, the sensitive, petulant features of the blind girl, "and saw you standing in the sunshine. So I thought I would inquire after Mr. Davenal. He and I met up at the Tower the other day and I was extremely sorry to hear this morning that he had been seriously wounded."

Kate Hartigan's lips trembled.

"Yes," she faltered, "they found him last night lying at the gate there. Someone had stabbed him in the back as he came in at it, the doctor says. He is a little better now, the nurse thinks, but he is very ill."

"Poor fellow!" said Paul Jerome, and added, still fixing his keen, bright eyes on the blind girl's face, "I should not have thought him the sort of man to have enemies—and he had not been robbed, I hear, so the deed must have been dictated by motives of revenge or hate."

"We—we think," murmured Kit, "that perhaps he was mistaken for someone else. But it all happened so quickly. He had gone out for a walk with my brother, who left him to go home to his lodgings, and it was not an hour after they left here together that he was brought in bleeding to death."

The war-correspondent frowned reflectively and looked over his shoulder at Irene Tarleton. She was watching them curiously from her seat on a tall brown mare, half saddle, half carriage horse, one of the single pair kept at the Tower stables.

"If—if only Dennis had not left him," went on Kit, unconscious of his inattention; "but there, I daresay he would have run away from the wretch with the knife, as he did from the train at the crossing."

An odd expression flitted across Paul Jerome's shrewd countenance.

"You are hard on your brother," he said.

Kit sneered.

"I hate a man to be a coward!" she retorted. "Why should Dennis be one—he is big and strong? *You* are brave."

"I am used to exciting situations, if that is what you mean," responded the war-correspondent; "courage is often only a kind of use."

He hesitated and glanced again towards Irene; the brown mare was pawing the cobblestones restlessly. Kit moved towards the gate.

"You have your horse with you," she cried childishly; "do let me pet him a little. He is brave, too, and clever, or you would have been killed by the engine as well as me."

The war-correspondent held the wicket open for her, and, following her through, took the bridle of the white hunter and drew him to the kerb for the blind girl to caress.

"This is the young lady who figured in my adventure, Miss Tarleton," he remarked; "safe and sound, as you perceive."

Irene Tarleton scanned pityingly the pale face and sightless eyes.

"I am very glad to know that you came to no harm," she said, stooping from her saddle to speak to the blind girl; "won't you tell me how it was—Mr. Jerome is too modest to describe his own exploits."

Kit had been listening intently to the clear, sympathetic tones—"seeing with one's ears," as it has been called. Her absorbed expression relaxed; she was satisfied.

"It was very dangerous, miss," she answered; "the train was almost on me when he jumped the crossing-gates on this dear old horse and picked me up like a dropped handkerchief. When I came to my senses, miss—for I had fainted with the fright of it all—I was in the lane on the other side of the crossing, and him trying to bring me out of my faint."

Irene shuddered.

"What a fearful experience!" she murmured. "You must be more careful of the trains in future."

The blind girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, yes, miss," she said drily, "I'll be more careful, you can be sure of that."

She patted the white hunter's sleek withers.

"Good-bye, you big, brave thing!" she exclaimed, and stepped back to the wicket; there had been a pause and her instinct had told her one or other, if not both, of the riders, was anxious to be gone.

Paul Jerome sprang to his saddle.

"Good-bye," he said to her. "I will bring him to see you again one of these days. I shall want to know for myself how Mr. Davenal goes on."

"Good-bye," added Irene; "and do be careful of that terrible level-crossing, won't you."

Kit nodded and smiled as they rode away. A groom who had been waiting at a neighbouring corner walked his horse leisurely after them. When the three had turned away from the sea-front and were ascending the hill towards the Tower, Irene spoke.

"Mr. Jerome," she said, "I do think it was fine of you to risk your life like that. You ought to have the V.C."

"Nonsense!" replied the war-correspondent, "it was very easy. But even if it had been really difficult I should be more than repaid by a word of praise—however undeserved—from you."

Irene coloured and laughed. The white hunter had swerved under Paul Jerome's knee, and the war-correspondent was riding very close to her. She glanced back.

"You do flatter most delightfully," she rejoined; "but pray don't forget that I have a chaperon."

"The dickens take that groom!" exclaimed the war-correspondent.

"Poor man!" said Irene. "No, let us send him to——"

"Where?" asked Paul Jerome eagerly.

Irene regarded him with demure self-possession.

"To my aunt in Yorkshire," she retorted provokingly, and shook the brown mare into a trot.

The war-correspondent surrendered to her mood of coquetry. After all, Lady Tarleton's threat of banishment might have been no idle one, and, though few would have suspected it, the war-correspondent was, by nature, a deliberate person.

Also, at the back of his head, Paul Jerome was thinking of Kit Hartigan's words: "He went out for a walk with my brother." "He" was John Davenal, and now John Davenal, stabbed through the lung, was lying at the point of death. "He went out with my brother." And "my brother" was Dennis Hartigan—the man who had left his blind sister on the railway crossing to die.

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SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

"You are My Dear Father."

In his small, white-curtained bedroom at Hawthorn Cottage, John Davenal lay asleep. The holland blind was lowered to shut out the rays of the sun, and the wounded man's pillow was darkened by the shadow of a tall screen placed between it and the casement. But the window was open, and the sound of the still-flowing tide came in with the salt sea-air.

The diver breathed, even in his sleep, with painful quickness. His body had been sorely drained of blood, and the stout heart in his broad and heaving chest fought hard to keep circulating what was left in the depleted veins.

Moira, sitting by the fireside, listened with an anxious intentness to the tell-tale respirations.

The nurse, standing by the window, listened also, but with the quiet self-possession that comes of a long intimacy with the mysterious powers displayed by life in its battle with death. She was a pleasant, pink-cheeked Englishwoman, with the bright, yet gentle demeanour of her class.

Suddenly John Davenal's breathing changed, and he opened his eyes. In his blanched face their grave, grey pupils gleamed as they fell upon the golden head at his side. He lay motionless for a moment, and then spoke, faintly, unsteadily.

"Is that you, Moira?" he whispered.

Moira leant over him.

"Yes, dad," she answered.

John Davenal moved his head on the pillow. The nurse had come softly to the foot of the bed; the diver turned his gaze upon her.

"You might let us be awhile," he said; "I've a word to say to my lass here."

The nurse hesitated—it was alike dangerous to thwart or to indulge him.

"You ought not to talk," she said, reprovingly; "but if you will promise me not to sit up and to stop the minute I come back, I will do as you wish."

John Davenal smiled weakly.

"I'm obliged to you, nurse," he said. "I can't rest until I've settled something with Moira, but she'll not let me be foolish, will you, my lass?"

Moira shook her head, and the nurse slipped away.

The diver moved slightly on his pillow again, and his glance sought the old-fashioned bureau near him.

"Open yon," he murmured; "in the well in the middle of the desk, there's something flat and three-cornered, wrapped in paper. Fetch it, just as it is. My keys are on the dressing-table—I had them put where I could see them."

Moira obeyed, and, unlocking the upper "drawer" of the ancient piece of furniture, gained access to the inner recesses of the concealed "desk." She found the packet he had referred to, and brought it to the bedside. The diver looked from it to her and his blanched skin grew ruddy with the spasm of emotion that thrilled him.

"My lass," he faltered, "doctor says I'm not to excite myself, and I'll not, for I want to live, if it's to be Heaven's will. But I've a strange thing to tell thee." He relapsed into a broader dialect than that which he ordinarily employed. "Thou'rt my daughter in love and in duty, but not in blood. I've deceived thee all these years. It was for thy own good and happiness, lass, yet haply thou'lt find it hard to forgive me."

His grey eyes suffused with tears and Moira saw them. The throb of surprise that had stung her died away, she sank on her knees by the bed, took his hand in hers, and put her cheek to it.

"Dad," she murmured, "dear, dear dad, I have nothing to forgive. What does it matter? Real fathers are often not kind, and you have been, oh, so good to me always. You are my dear father in the very best way. I couldn't love you any better if you *were* my real father. Don't think about it any more until you get well, and then, if you want to, you shall tell me the rest."

John Davenal clasped the little fingers that were caressing his own.

"My heart's light to hear you speak like that," he said; "it's cut me to the quick often to think you weren't my own child, and I, all the time, willing to give everything in the world to have you so."

"You were very foolish, dad, dear," whispered Moira, "and now not another word, or nurse will be very cross."

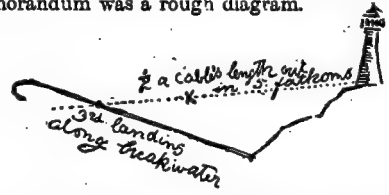
The diver knitted his brows.

"I must tell thee more, my lass," he said; "much more, but first look in the paper you have there."

Moira did so. In the folded white sheet there lay the fragment of engraved metal that the diver had brought out of Groudle Bay.

She gazed with astonishment at the flat, irregular triangle, with its imperfect wording. There was her own name, and—lacking the dates which should have followed them—the strange syllables—"Born" and "Died."

On a flap of the paper was written, in the diver's bold hand, "Brought up off the breakwater in Groudle Bay." Below this memorandum was a rough diagram.



John Davenal watched her as she deciphered it.

"Those are the bearings of the place I brought it up at," he said. "At first I thought nothing of it, and yet I hid it from my men lest they should talk, and, knowing you weren't my own child, I was nervous. But now the thought of it's come back to me, and I'm not sure that it mayn't mean something—something to you, my lass."

Moira studied the fragment of metal, fascinated by the blurred letters that spelt her own name. The diver studied her, almost jealously aware of her interest in it.

"It's—it's a bit of a coffin-plate," he gasped; "if—if only I had got the other half of it! Yon piece was caught in a niche of the rock under the yacht's bow, and I plucked it out more by chance than anything else. The other bit might have told us what I'd have been glad to know, now I lie here, lass, for I'd fain believe that he who calls himself so was not your father—you being what you are, and him what he is, a wastrel and a blackguard."

The diver's utterance had quickened excitedly; it grew thick and indistinct, then failed altogether, and his eyes closed. Alarmed, Moira stole to the door. The nurse was already entering. A glance at Moira's face, and she passed her quickly to gain the bedside. John Davenal had re-opened his eyes; they sought for Moira.

"You have been talking quite long enough, Mr. Davenal," said the nurse, quietly and soothingly, "not another word. Moira must run away for the present. She can come again later on."

John Davenal's gaze travelled to the unfolded paper on the

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bed and the piece of metal that lay by it. Moira understood his meaning and took them up. The nurse wiped the beaded sweat from the wounded man's forehead, and Moira,—thus temporarily screened—crept out of the room.

Her brain was numb with the amazement that had fallen on her at John Davenal's strange and all too incomplete confession. She paused to gaze at the broken metal. "Moira"—who? And yet it could not be she, for she was not dead, and the plate said, "Died ——" What else could the diver—her father no longer—have to tell her? Would he live to tell it to her?

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Paul Jerome Saw.

"No, I think we'll get ashore now, my venerable friend. I have emptied the sandwich-box, you have accounted for the whisky and water and are half a hundredweight of codling to the good besides. I have to get up to the Tower and dress before seven. It is after six, and we shall have to dodge in against what wind there is."

"Aye, aye, sir, you're right about that," was the cheery reply, and the speaker—a grizzled Groudle veteran—threw down the hooks and sinker that he had been about to overhaul, and stepped to the stern sheets of the broad-beamed fishing-coble in which the war-correspondent and he had been beating along the rocky fringes of Groudle Head.

Paul Jerome moved to the tiller, and brought the heavy boat up into the wind. The fisherman loosed the sheet of the foresail, and pushed the boom of the mainsail over. The boat gybed and began to beat back towards the little town.

The light was fading, and the green waters of the Irish Sea shimmered under the dull yellow sunset; the irregular puffs of air that eddied across them impelled the fishing-coble slowly towards her goal.

Rounding the bluff promontory, on whose seaward slope stood the tall tower of the Groudle Light, the little vessel made for the harbour. The fitful breeze was blowing off the land, and they were able to hug the shore. All was singularly quiet and lonely, the bay was destitute of shipping, and the granite walls of the pier and breakwater shut in the activities of the harbour.

The fishing-coble breasted her way across the triangular bit of sea that lay between the breakwater and the promontory above. Suddenly the boatman uttered an exclamation—right before them lay a large smack, her mainsail apeak, her anchor down.

"That's odd, sir," he said; "there's diving going on there again, where Sir Guy Vanbrugh's yacht sank. It was only the other day that they got her up and took her into the harbour."

He eased the mainsheet of the coble, and she kept out to pass the other vessel. The little craft forged slowly by the larger, and Paul Jerome got on his feet to look at the group in the waist of the smack. The helmet of the diver had been unscrewed—a rough sailor-like fellow in a sou'-wester was just lifting it off.

The war-correspondent started—the head of the diver was that of a young and lovely woman, whose masses of fair hair rained over her shoulders as she stood shrinkingly in the clumsy diving-dress.

(Another long instalment next week.)

WIFE: "Are you pleased with our new maid?" Husband: "Very much." Wife: "I thought so. I have discharged her."

"MISS CAYENNE is a very smart young woman," he remarked admiringly. "Does she say clever things?" "Better than that. She sees the point when somebody else says them."

GUSHLEY: "Would you think of me if I were ten thousand leagues away?" His Fiancée (from College): "As the maximum diameter of the earth is only eight thousand miles, Clarence, your supposition is an impossible one."

Your Editor Chats.

THE third list of sentences in our popular and novel competition appears on page 455. Any reader who has not made up his mind until now to enter it can obtain the issues of *Short Stories* dated March 28th and April 4th, which contain the first two lists, by sending threepence in stamps to the "Publisher, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C." It will be well to send at once in order to prevent disappointment in case the numbers are sold out earlier than is expected. The first list of sentences was also published in *Pearson's Weekly* and *Home Notes*, both dated April 2nd. The lists in these papers are available for the competition.

If you have any friends who are not regular readers of *Short Stories*, and whom you think may perhaps have missed the numbers containing the first lists of sentences in the competition, you should not delay a moment in telling them of it. The finding of the names of the railway stations will be such a pleasant occupation for the Easter holiday evenings.

THE reproductions of picturesque men's heads, about which I told you a few weeks back, will be found on various pages of this paper. I shall be glad to hear what my readers think of them, and whether they would like me to try to secure some others for reproduction on a future occasion.

I TAKE this opportunity of reminding my readers of the article on the FRESH AIR FUND, which was published last week. I hope that everyone read it and will do all they can to help on this noble work of brightening the lives of the poor little mites from the slums. It is not London alone that is benefited, but most of the other large towns in the kingdom.

If you are not able to afford a large donation out of your own pocket, perhaps you can get up a concert or entertainment of some sort, hold a bazaar, or by some other means raise money for this most deserving cause. Remember that every penny of the money subscribed is spent on the children—in railway fares and food. All the expenses of management are shared by the Ragged School Union and C. Arthur Pearson, Limited.

Last year 126,000 children had a day in the country; this year it is hoped to send many more than that, but it will not be possible to do so unless everyone helps. Think of it! Only ninepence is required to provide enjoyment for one child for a whole day, with plenty to eat and drink. Such a cheap charity is absolutely unique. All subscriptions, which will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*, should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W. C., who will also forward collecting sheets on application.

Your Editor.

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THREE LETTERS.

Telling of a Proposal and its Businesslike Acceptance.

YOUNG Mr. Dusenberry asked Miss Lucretia Elphinstone to marry him. Miss Elphinstone was the daughter of a candidate for Parliament, and shared her father's cautious nature. She told her lover that she would consider his proposal, and send her answer in a few days. Within a week the young man received the following letter:

MR. THOMAS DUSENBERRY,

Dear Sir,—On last Thursday night you notified me that I had been honoured with the nomination of queen of your heart and wife of your bosom, and you urged me to accept. I replied then that I would let you know my decision in a few days. I have now the pleasure of informing you that I accept the nomination, and of setting forth the programme of principles upon which I stand.

I unhesitatingly arraign and condemn the practice of too many men in doing all their love-making before marriage. I shall expect as much kissing and petting after the honeymoon wanes as while it is at its full.

My position on the tobacco question you already know. It is most pronounced. The drawing-room curtains must and shall be protected from the fumes of a pipe and cigar.

I am unalterably opposed to the free and unlimited coinage of excuses for remaining out late at night. The latch-key is an article so liable to misuse that the only safety is the entire abolishment of that cause of so many domestic disagreements.

I believe in the utmost freedom of the wife in regard to her own actions, and unhesitatingly assert that every husband should esteem it a privilege to supply her with the necessary funds, not only for housekeeping, but also for the purchase of articles of apparel and adornment, for religious and charitable uses, and for pin-money. It should never be necessary for the wife to ask her husband for money. He should turn over to her, on salary day, his entire receipts, deducting only the small portion required by him for 'bus fares and lunches for the current week.

It is the wife's privilege to invite her mother to make visits of any length, and also to extend occasional invitations to other members of her family, without waiting for the consent of her husband, and it is the duty of the husband to treat such relatives of his wife, while under their roof, with profound consideration.

The wife's right to maintain and keep a pug-dog shall not be impugned by deed, word, look, or manner.

Hoping that these sound principles will meet with your cheerful acceptance, and that our married life, conducted under their beneficent influence, will be a long and happy one, I have the honour to subscribe myself.—Your loving fiancée,

LUCRETIA ELPHINSTONE.

DUSENBERRY'S REPLY.

MISS LUCRETIA ELPHINSTONE,

Dear Madam,—Your reply to my proposal of marriage was received yesterday. I did not answer it immediately, because its somewhat unconventional style seemed to require some deeper consideration than is usually accorded to a letter accepting a proposal of marriage.

I have considered your programme clause by clause, and I find it extremely difficult to bring myself to accept its principles with the same earnestness with which you seem to have formulated them.

I have no objection whatever to your first clause. Married men should continue their love-making after marriage with the fervour which marked the engagement stage. The honeymoon should be kept constantly full.

Your position on the tobacco question is too pronounced. I do not think that a wife should entertain for her drawing-room curtains a deeper affection than for her husband.

On the question of latch-keys, my position, though different, is as fixed as your own, and cannot be altered. The right of a husband to have a latch-key must and shall be maintained.

Regarding the financial system you declare yourself in favour of, I have only to say that it can have no place in the domestic government of this age. My wife shall be supplied with all the money she can reasonably want for all proper purposes, but no self-respecting husband can hand over to her his entire salary, "deducting only the small portion required by him for 'bus fares and lunches for the current week."

Your views regarding your mother's visits and the proper treatment of your relatives when they call are approved without reservation.

I now reach the final and exceedingly important pug-dog clause. On this point we are at irrevocable variance. Since you have raised this pug-dog issue, I feel it incumbent upon me to meet it squarely. I quote your declaration of principles on this important question. You say: "The wife's right to maintain and keep a pug-dog shall not be impugned by deed, word, look, or manner." Permit me to say that you speak of a "right" which does not exist.

I cannot endure the steady company of an animal whose only recommendation is his ugliness, whose chief characteristics are stupidity and perversity. Your devotion to Cæsar marks you as a double-hearted girl. One lobe may beat for me, but the other beats for him. This I cannot endure. I will brook no rival at my altar. The other clauses in your programme to which I have taken exception are matters of moment, but the pug-dog question is the rock on which we split, and which must separate us.—Yours very truly, THOMAS DUSENBERRY.

A day or two later Mr. Dusenberry received the following letter:

MR. THOMAS DUSENBERRY.

Dear Tom,—The pug has been drowned. Come and see me to-night.—Your loving LUCRETIA.

The engagement of Mr. Thomas Dusenberry and Miss Lucretia Elphinstone was announced within three days of the receipt of the last note.

A. E. Porson.

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In Love With a Name.

The Story of a Woman's Ideal.

* * *

"You won't go, then, although I have secured seats?"

"No; I had rather not."

"Well, I can't make it out! You have always been so enthusiastic about the man; while I know that you have a special hiding-place among your treasures for Neil Stuart's photo."

"Now you are rude! Of course I appreciate the trouble you have taken in the matter; Mr. Stuart as 'Millionaire Midas' is also, I admit, a tempting inducement; but—I have my reasons for not going."

"Then there is an end of it!—though you are certainly missing a good thing, and Neil Stuart himself saw to the selection of the seats; the best in the house."

"That was very good of him," said Evelyn Hood, with a pleased smile, and flushing ever so slightly, "I was not aware that you knew Mr. Stuart personally."

"Know Stuart!—why, I am vain enough to think, that if there is one man in all the world who has succeeded in getting behind the curtain of Neil Stuart's reserve, I am that man!"

"Really, Wallace! and—and what have you found?"

"Ah! now she wakes to life! this emotionless fair one! What have I found? why, a heart as big and as true, as ever beat in the breast of man!"

"I knew it!" said Evelyn, half under her breath; yet not so quietly but that Wallace Rayne caught the exclamation.

"Knew it! why you have never spoken to him! never even seen him act!"

"Yes—I know!" she said in some confusion; "and—and you are too quick to take me up, Wallace; but it is a little strange, that my estimate of Neil Stuart, formed only from hearsay, reading, and pictures of him; and yours, founded on personal knowledge, should agree so completely."

"I suppose it is. But I tell you what it is, Evelyn!" he half jokingly added; "if this sort of thing continues, I shall begin to be a little jealous of Stuart. Only that I know him to be a thorough woman-hater, and that, therefore, the chances of the sweet girl adorer are absolutely hopeless, I should fear for my own matrimonial prospects, Evelyn; I should indeed."

"Wallace!—you are just horrid!" said Evelyn, an angry red spot showing on either cheek; "you had better take Cora Holroyd with you to the theatre to-night; there will be no need for fear, with regard to your matrimonial prospects in *that* direction!"

"Perhaps you are right!" replied Rayne hotly. "Still, I am not disposed to adopt your suggestion, for the simple reason (here he took an envelope from his pocket, which first deliberately tearing into half a dozen pieces, he dropped into the fire by which they were standing) that the tickets no longer exist."

* * * * *

Evelyn Hood and Wallace Rayne had been an engaged couple for some two years before Neil Stuart, the actor from the North, had by his wonderful playing of the title *rôle* in his own play, *Millionaire Midas*, revealed to Londoners that a dramatic star, of the very first order, had risen above the theatrical horizon.

Young Rayne, a Foreign Office clerk, while being hot-tempered and a trifle overbearing, was not by any means a bad fellow at heart. At any rate, until about three months before the conversation above between them, Evelyn regarded him as the *beau ideal* of what a husband should be.

They were both of them passionately fond of the "play," and devoted "first-nighters."

Perhaps had Wallace Rayne been a little more reasonable when his *fiancée* decided not to attend the opening night of *Millionaire Midas*; and, instead of expressing sullen surprise, good-humouredly looked upon it as a whim merely, he would have been saved much trouble in the future. But he was one of those men who, offence once given, neither forgive nor forget, until the offence is purged. So, knowing Evelyn's admiration for the famous actor (admiration in his opinion, absurd, seeing that she had never seen Neil Stuart in the flesh), he never ceased in his endeavour to lure her to witness the piece and the man; his last persuasive being a box from the hand of the actor himself. When even this had no effect he lost control of himself; his thoughts inclining to an insane, unreasoning jealousy.

Long before Neil Stuart's London appearance, the public had been well-informed through the Press of almost every detail in his career. Portraits without number had appeared in the illustrated weeklies, and in the current monthly magazines, so that the theatrically-disposed were made familiar, not only with the actor's history, but with his features.

Now this so-called history was defective in one very important particular; the private side of it—Neil Stuart's life off the stage—was absolutely unknown, except to the very few. At the close of each performance, he left the theatre, immediately after changing his costume, and no man, save his business manager, and two intimate friends (of whom Wallace Rayne was one), knew the place of his abode, or his manner of life.

His somewhat sad cast of countenance, spare, almost emaciated frame, and ascetic features, gave rise to many stories concerning him, which, manifestly, were impudent fabrications.

It was impossible to get an interview with him for journalistic purposes, both before and subsequent to his coming to London, so that popular impression of him was based solely on imagination, and was consequently erroneous.

Evelyn Hood was a girl with the imaginative faculty very strongly developed. The preliminary puffs and obviously mendacious accounts of the coming star had no effect upon

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her; but, after reading a clever appreciation of the actor in the part he had made his own; and studying the features of the man, through a photograph given to her by Wallace Rayne, she gradually began to build up in her own mind a conception of him; to set up an ideal, as utterly unlike the literary and journalistic portrait as possible.

By the time that the curtain was ready to rise on the Metropolitan production of *Millionaire Midas*, the ideal had become the hero, and, dreading disillusionment, she would not risk it by coming face to face with the object of her strange worship.

She loved her betrothed; was hurt at his new tone and manner, after her final refusal to accompany him to the theatre; but she somehow felt that, given the realisation of her "ideal," the parting with the original man of her choice, would not mean for her much "sweet sorrow."

Mention has been made of Cora Holroyd, who posed as Evelyn's bosom friend and confidant, but who was in reality her ever-scheming rival.

People wondered at the long intimacy between the two girls; at, what they called, Evelyn's shortsightedness in failing to see Cora's persistent policy of standing well in the eyes of Wallace Rayne.

But, whatever might be the latter's mistaken idea with regard to Evelyn, he was certainly guiltless of any tender feeling in connection with Cora Holroyd. That designing young woman was in the nature of his *bête noire*, so much so, indeed, that he was always on the defensive when opportunity threw them together.

Time went on and at the end of nine months, *Millionaire Midas* was at its zenith, artistically as well as financially. But the lease of the theatre being up, and no other house being available, the production had perforce to be withdrawn in the very heyday of success.

At midnight after the last performance, Rayne sat at supper with Neil Stuart in a private room at the Carlton.

It was by way of a farewell feast, as the actor was to leave London for the North the following morning.

"Rayne," said the player, with a weariness born of a long run, and the exigencies of a trying part; "I should like to have seen your wife that is to be, before I left. You know London will not see me again for nearly two years; perhaps never; for life is so uncertain, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," answered Rayne.

"We know it is! But, tell me, what is Miss Hood's reason for refusing either to meet me, or to see me act?"

"My dear Stuart! you are as wise as I. But if you don't mind, we will change the subject."

Neil Stuart was a man of over forty, and with a larger experience in matters of the heart than most people gave him credit for.

Years before, when but a novice, and with all his triumphs to come, he had met with and loved a girl, who seemingly returned his love, and in whom he placed his faith, even to the uttermost.

As an actress she had talent, some said genius, and this in time led her up the professional primrose-way.

Even this would not have divided them; for though more slowly, as surely he too advanced towards the coveted tree-top. But there came along the inevitable man with the money bags, the illiterate plutocrat, who purchases his wife as he would any other marketable article, and with the giving of the receipt Neil Stuart's life-dream of love and happiness vanished for ever.

Not naturally given to suspicions or unkind thoughts of his fellow creatures, he rigidly kept aloof from society, burying himself, in the intervals of theatrical engagement, in the heart of the ruggedest part of Sutherlandshire. Here he had what had once been a shooting-box, but which he had converted into a comfortable, if not luxurious home.

On the loch, near his home, he had a steam yacht, and as the loch communicated with the sea, he was enabled to gratify his taste for cruising, without taking anyone into his confidence.

He was a solitary man; a man who, outside his profession, lived a veritable hermit's life.

In the neighbourhood of his retreat he was simply worshipped; the distinguished actor, who, having the world at his feet, declined response to its advances, being scarce recognisable in the tweed-clothed, homely-mannered gentleman who made friends with the poorest on the country side.

He was rich—very rich, and was never so happy as when helping his poorer brethren who needed his assistance.

His last word to Wallace Rayne as he bid him "good-night" at parting, showed that the matter of Evelyn's strange attitude towards him, was still uppermost in his thoughts, as an unsolved riddle.

"My dear fellow!" he said, placing both hands on his friend's shoulders; "I feel sure that for some inexplicable reason, you and your sweetheart are drifting apart. Am I right?"

"You are more than right. Six months ago—in fact, almost from the day you sent that box—Evelyn joined the nursing fraternity. Three years ago, she served her probation; not from necessity, but because, I believe, she liked nursing. Now, it is different, she has definitely adopted the profession, and we are no longer as we were."

"I am sorry," said the actor, sighing deeply, as at some new-stirred memory; "and I can only sincerely wish, for both your sakes, that it were otherwise. You are coming to my Highland home to see me, you know, and I shall expect then to hear that all is well. Again, good-night, and—good bye."

* * * * *

Next morning all London was startled to read that Neil Stuart, who, the night before, had spoken his farewell acknowledgments to an enthusiastic and crowded audience, was lying, the victim of a terrible carriage accident, in one of the surgical wards of Charing Cross Hospital.

It appeared that on leaving the hotel, the carriage went up the Haymarket, turned to the left at the top, and made to cross Piccadilly Circus, in the direction of Regent Street.

Half-way across, a motor-car, driven at high speed, and evidently by incapable hands, bore down upon the brougham, which, unable to escape collision, was literally smashed to splinters.

The horse was killed on the spot; though the coachman miraculously escaped; but the unfortunate actor received injuries that made it doubtful whether he would survive removal to the hospital.

Wallace Rayne's first action upon hearing of the catastrophe, was to drive to Charing Cross.

He could only make inquiries; no one was as yet allowed to see the patient.

He learnt that Neil Stuart's condition was so grave that it was advisable that his friends should be sent for. And then a fresh surprise was sprung upon everybody.

The famous actor and dramatist, the wealthy man, had not a relative in the world. Rayne knew this, and communicated his knowledge to the hospital authorities.

There was nothing then, than for his friend to be allowed to see him.

As Rayne entered the ward, which was a small and semi-private one, he saw that the doctors had just left the injured man, leaving a nurse in charge.

The latter's back was towards the visitor, but something about the height, figure, and poise of the head, made him start with a sense of familiarity.

The sound of his footsteps caused the nurse to turn her head. It was Evelyn!—who motioned to him with finger on lip.

"He will not be able to recognise anybody for at least another hour; and, perhaps, not even then," she whispered to him.

The drawn, ascetic face, looked death-like, in its unearthly pallor; it seemed almost impossible that Neil Stuart would live to act again.

Through that day Evelyn Hood watched the flicker back to consciousness, when she sought rest for an hour or two.

When, the next morning, she stood by the bedside, with Wallace Rayne near by, the sick man looked first at his friend and then at her, a half smile upon his face.

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"I know you," he said faintly; "you are Rayne's dear love—I have wanted much to see you, and—I am glad."

* * * * *

It was fully three weeks before Neil Stuart was fit to leave the hospital.

It was in the morning, early; but the previous day he had sent for Rayne to come and see him.

"What will you give me," said the actor; "if *I give you* back something, which, I think, you value very highly?"

"I don't quite follow you," replied Rayne.

"No?—well, what would you say then, if I have discovered why the girl of your heart has acted so mysteriously these past few months?"

"I don't know," said Rayne, who, however, began dimly to see what the other was driving at.

"Ah! It's not a pleasant thing to have to confess, but I'm afraid that this foolish little woman, to whose good nursing, by the way, I owe my life, full of romantic notions, fell in love, not with my humble self, but with my photographic presentment. I came to this conclusion, after much artful talk with Miss Evelyn, and yesterday, by way of atonement and reparation for having been the innocent cause of strife between you, I painted for the young lady such a terrible picture of myself, in even my mildest moods, that she fairly threw the whole thing overboard."

"But, Stuart——"

"Wait a moment! I once suffered by the cherishing of an ideal; I was not going to see my friend's happiness, and a charming girl's best interests wrecked upon the rocks in like fashion, if I could help it."

"Stuart, I told her long ago that you were the best of good fellows!"

"Did you?—then you have only yourself to blame for a big part of the mischief. However, I don't intend to always play the beast to your prince, and when you are married beyond redemption, shall do my best to disabuse your wife's mind of all uncanny things concerning myself. Meanwhile, you resume your part, and play it for all it is worth, while I, in the *Fairy Queen*, seek health and strength sailing the Mediterranean."

* * * * *

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Rayne not only six months ago, paid a visit to the Sutherlandshire actor-hermit, but the latter is pledged, on her wifely honour, to be present at the forthcoming reappearance of Neil Stuart in London, in a new piece of his own, which is expected to take the town by storm.

Ralph Edwards.

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To remain in a condition of physical deformity—for extreme obesity *is* a deformity—not to speak of the excessive discomfort, is very unwise when the means of a speedy, pleasant, and entirely permanent cure are ready to hand. The person labouring under a burden of superabundant fat also runs considerable risk of fatty degeneration of the vital organs, which might ultimately prove fatal. The means to which we have alluded is the famous "Russell" treatment for the cure of corpulency, a sure and safe treatment which has received the full endorsement of many eminent physicians as a rational and scientific process of fat reduction, harmless even to the most delicate subject. The "Russell" treatment, by a simple and quite comfortable action, brings about a decrease in weight varying from ½lb. to 2lb. per diem, commencing within the first day and night of the initial dose, and this decrease goes on steadily apace until the patient regains his or her proper symmetrical proportions. Mark this, too: The reduction is not merely abdominal, but the subcutaneous fat of the whole organism is proportionately reduced. Face, figure, hands, feet—wherever there is a superabundance of adipose tissue—every part is equally affected by the "Russell" treatment, and this without the slightest discomfort or inconvenience. Many processes of fat reduction require the most exhausting and unpleasant restrictions and conditions: violent exercise, sweating, a continuous use of cathartics, and a starvation dietary. None of these things enter into the "Russell" *régime*. The liquid compound, which is the chief item in the process, is a harmless vegetable preparation, not disagreeable to the taste, but, on the contrary, very refreshing and thirst-assuaging. It contains nothing that is not purely herbal, and, indeed, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, the originator of the system which bears his name, has given to the world in his well-known book, "Corpulency and the Cure," a full list of the ingredients of which his wonderful preparation is compounded; this is chiefly to demonstrate its entirely harmless nature. The compound is a tonic and an appetiser, as well as a potent fat-reducer, so that while the decrease of adipose tissue is proceeding rapidly the appetite is improved, more nourishment is taken, the blood is enriched, and all the vital organs receive renewed vitality and functional activity, the clogging fat around the heart, kidneys, etc., being gradually cleared away and eliminated from the system. We have perused "Corpulency and the Cure" with the greatest interest, and strongly recommend our stout readers to do the same. It is certainly the standard work on the subject of obesity cure, and contains many useful hints which may prove of great value even to those who might be disinclined to follow Mr. Russell's simple and admirable course of treatment. "Corpulency and the Cure" is the *vade mecum* of the stout, and the outcome of more than twenty years' scientific research. In short, what the author does not know about the formation and the elimination of fat is not worth knowing. If any of our corpulent friends are desirous of becoming authorities on the cure—*i.e.*, the *permanent* cure—of obesity, let them send three penny stamps to Mr. F. Cecil Russell, Woburn House, Store St., Bedford Sq., London, W.C., and they will receive by return, under private cover, a copy of "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pp.)—one of the most useful publications ever noticed in these columns.

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The Old and the New.

OR, AN ALTERED ENDING.

THERE was a block in the vehicular traffic, and several persons were waiting on the kerb for a chance to cross the road. One was a woman of thirty or thereabouts, whose countenance still showed signs of the beauty that had belonged to it when the woman had been a girl; that face also exhibited traces of deep suffering—mental rather than physical suffering. Near her, but unconscious of her presence, stood two young men, watching impatiently for a chance to dodge under the head of a horse and reach the other side.

"I say, Clark," remarked one of them suddenly to the other, "don't you think it would be a good idea to offer good remuneration to the man in the street or the woman at home to tell his or her life story, provided that it contains romance? I've a good mind to suggest that to the chief. He wants good stories, and the best are those taken from life. Truth is stranger than fiction."

"You might have omitted the last sentence and have made a more original observation!" laughed his companion. "Don't fancy that your idea will work. You see, if you advertise, the advertisement will reach the eyes of only a few who have a really good story to tell, and only a small percentage of those will care to tell it. A few guineas will not tempt them. The very people you wish to get at are just those who don't read the journals and newspapers, because they can't afford to take them in."

"I don't agree with you altogether. I think—— Hallo! Here's a chance at last! Quick!"

The woman saw them make a dive, as it were, and they had vanished. She could not cross so quickly, so she remained standing on the kerb; and she continued in that position long after the traffic had cleared.

She had heard the remarks of the young men, who were apparently members of the staff of some weekly journal. Write her life story, if there were romance in it! Romance? There was more than enough for one; she felt that she had had more than her share. Write for money? Could she do that? Could she lay bare the story of her girlhood—for money?

"No, no!" she cried at length, with a shudder. "I want money, badly enough, and the 'few guineas' of which that young man seemed to speak so lightly would be a small fortune to me, but I can't do it!"

She went on her way to the firm which gave her work to do in the form of painting slides for magic lanterns. She handed in the work which she was carrying, and was told that the half-crown earned thereby would be paid on Saturday at the usual hour. No, there was nothing more just then; there was not much doing just at that time.

She returned to her attic room in the dingy street. The squalor of the neighbourhood made her shudder. Her own room was scrupulously clean but contained very little furniture. She sat down on the wooden chair by the deal table near the window and meditated.

Steadily increasing poverty had driven her from one place to another, always lower; she had been compelled to sell the piano because pupils did not come in sufficient numerical strength to enable her to live and pay the rent in a good neighbourhood, and she was now reduced almost to want. Her rent for this room was in arrears and food had been scanty of late.

"Why should I not write it?" she cried, after a long silence, and there was a ring of bitterness in her voice. "I want money; I want it badly! There is only one person left in the world who would recognise it, if it met his eyes, but he went to Australia, and it isn't likely that he will see it! Shall I? Yes, I will!"

From a little shelf within her reach she took a penny bottle of black ink and a pen, then a small packet of notepaper. She opened some of the doubled sheets of paper in order to obtain a size which, she thought, would be nearer to that used in newspaper offices, and seized the pen nervously.

"Shall I tell my own story in the first person—shall it be 'I' all the way through? Yes, I can write it better, more naturally, in that way. I must leave the title till the last; I can't think of one just now."

Another moment of hesitation, and then she began to write; after the first few lines she forgot that she was writing for money—she was writing a confession. She lost all thought of her surroundings and lived the story over again:

"My father was a village squire, a man of means and local position, and with good connections in London. I was his darling, and he would have done anything for me. I had all I wanted and my life was a happy dream.

"People said I was pretty, and my father's sister, who had married Lord Rutcliffe, and was one of the leaders of London Society, said that I ought to be presented. My dear father, always desirous to make the most of me, consented to my going to stay with her and 'coming out.'

"I was nearly eighteen, and, although perfectly happy and contented where I was, the novelty of the proposal attracted me. In due course I prepared to go, and it was not till then that a drop of the bitter fell into the cup of sweetness. I saw the look of sadness in Clive's eyes, and I was sorry.

"I had forgotten Clive Wilson. We had been companions since childhood, and it was quite understood that we were to marry as soon as I was old enough. Clive was three years older than I. It was one of those family arrangements which everyone, even the two most interested parties, accept as a matter of course. And, strange as it may appear, it was so much a matter of course that we almost lost sight of the fact!

"Clive did not like my going to London and joining the fashionable element, but I only laughed at him and called him a foolish boy.

"'Anyone would think I was going away for good!' I cried. 'I shall come back to father and you!'

"Clive still looked gloomy, but I was really too much occupied

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with my preparations to pay attention to him. I dismissed him from my presence and then from my mind, and began to live, as I imagined it would be, the life I was to lead in London Society.

"I suppose I did see Clive again; I have a hazy idea that he was at the station to see me off; but I cannot remember distinctly. I was in a whirl.

"I stayed with my aunt till the great day, when I was presented and 'came out.' My father returned to the Hall, and left me to the care of his sister.

"I was very little more than an unsophisticated country girl, and my aunt was unaccustomed to the care of young girls, not having children of her own. Lord Rutcliffe was a prominent figure in clubland, and the numerous guests whom he invited to his town house were not always fit companions for a girl. There were numerous parties and functions at my aunt's house, and my life seemed to be passed in a continuous round of pleasure. I was dazed and taken out of myself.

"One constant visitor was Albert Glover, who paid me the most marked attention; he was reputed to be a man of wealth, and he certainly belonged to a good family. Looking back, I see that my aunt was not careful enough, and she herself admitted it sorrowfully when it was too late. Albert fascinated me; his passionate declarations made me captive, and left me without so much as a desire to keep from him. In short, when I left the metropolis to spend the off season with my father at the old home, I was engaged to Albert Glover, and wore his diamond betrothal ring on the third finger of my left hand.

"'My dear child,' cried my father, as he helped me to alight from the train. His voice faltered and he pretended to be busy with some wraps. 'Clive is not here,' he added, 'but he expects to be with us to-morrow. You know that he has secured a very good appointment in Manchester?'

"I remembered having heard something about it, but I said nothing, for the mention of his name there, in the old place, recalled the fact of the life-long engagement. I went away engaged to Clive, and I had returned as the promised bride of another man! It had only happened two days ago, and my father knew nothing of it.

"My father caught sight of the ring almost as soon as I took my gloves off. He thought that Clive had given it to me and when I told him the truth he looked grave.

"'I hope you have chosen well, Allie, and my only desire is for your happiness,' he said gently, 'but it will be a blow to Clive. Didn't you like him well enough to marry him?'

"'Yes, I think so!' I faltered. 'That is, I—— Oh, I'm so wretched! I was mad!' And I burst into a fit of weeping.

"Truly, it was a sorry home-coming!

"When I came down on the following morning, I was not wearing Albert's ring. It galled me like a fetter, and I was glad to lay it aside, but the chief reason for doing so was—I dared not let Clive see it.

"He came that afternoon—Clive Wilson, with his honest, manly face and truthful eyes; not the gay Society man, with his exaggerated phrases and compliments, his talk of merely empty functions and theatres, but plain, sterling manners and straightforward conversation. When I contrasted him with Albert Glover, my eyes were opened, and I wondered how I could have remained so long in ignorance of Clive's worth, how I could so easily have been taken captive by Albert. I almost trembled when I thought of the ring upstairs.

"Clive spoke to me in the old way; he made no allusion to my engagement to him, but all his attention implied that it was still in force. I began to detest Albert Glover, and I determined to tell him the truth, and break off the new engagement at once. I was realising, too, the advisability of being off with the old love before I was on with the new.

"That night I wrote to Albert and returned the ring; I told him that it was like a fetter, that I could not bear to be bound by it, and that I had deceived him, for I was already engaged to Clive Wilson. I felt light-hearted when I had sent that letter off, but it was only the beginning of my trouble. I did not

A Great Australian Discovery.

Australia, that mysterious country of gold, has been the birth place of many wonderful things. Foremost amongst them is the discovery by an eminent scientist of a natural vegetable substance which acts more beneficially upon the liver and digestive system than any medicine yet discovered. Chas. Forde, the discoverer of this substance, had long been impressed with the remarkable freedom from disease of the Australian natives.

On this subject the great Captain Cook wrote: "I did not observe (amongst the natives) any appearance of disease or bodily complaint or eruption of the skin. Very old men without hair and teeth showed no signs of decrepitude and were full of vivacity." There must be some reason for this, and Chas. Forde, armed with the implements of modern scientific research, sought for that reason amongst the rich profusion of Australian herbs which had been the sole medicines of the natives. After years of research he found himself the happy discoverer of a vegetable substance which acted on the liver and digestive organs differently and in superior manner to any medicine known. The best laboratories, the most modern appliances, and all that science dictated as being best for the purpose was requisitioned in the compounding of this substance into convenient medicinal form; and the result of it all was the production a few years back of Chas. Forde's Bile Beans—the most perfect medicine of modern times.

On their appearance, Bile Beans — the product of modern science—had to compete against the ancient and imperfect medicines which had been before the public for nearly half a century, but the public soon decided in their favour, and Bile Beans are now the most widely used family medicine; over three-quarters of a million doses being taken daily.

The superiority of Bile Beans lies in the fact that they do not merely purge, giving temporary relief only, like the old-fashioned, so-called remedies of forty or fifty years ago. They act directly on the liver and digestive organs, strengthening and stimulating those organs to perform their natural duties. They produce a gentle action on the bowels, curing or preventing constipation, cleansing the stomach and ridding the system of all impurities.

Do not be misled by claims of half a hundred pills in the box, where probably four to six constitutes a dose, and the doses cannot be discontinued. One Bile Bean is one dose, and they can be discontinued after the cure is effected. They are purely vegetable; they contain no harmful drugs, and they are the safest family medicine. Of all chemists at 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box.

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know the evil heart of Albert Glover; as yet I knew only his handsome face and honeyed tongue.

"Clive had to be off again at the end of three days, and on the fourth day Albert was announced. Although he tried to hide it, there was an evil gleam in his eyes that was apparent to me.

"'What is the meaning of that letter?' he asked coolly. 'I decline to give you up! You are mine, and although you may say differently, you know that you are mine, and mine only. You think that you love this man, but it is wrong! You love me!' He took me in his arms, and, pressing me passionately to his breast, he gazed deep into my eyes, as if he would penetrate to my very soul. "You love me!" he added. 'Deny it, if you can!'

"I tried to get free, to tell him that I loved Clive, but I seemed powerless in his grasp. His eyes still fixed on mine; holding me spellbound, he approached his lips to mine, and kissed me again and again. And I, poor bird, under the fascination of the serpent, I kissed him in return!

"I scarcely know what happened, but when I felt thoroughly able to realise the position Albert was gone, and I was wearing his ring. I remember staring at it stupidly; then I uttered a cry, and dragged it off my finger. My strength came back; I seemed to have suddenly become possessed of a will, a woman's will, and I resolved to free myself from the terrible fascination of this man.

"I wrote to him again, and he came to me two days later.

"'You shall not marry Clive Wilson!' he declared as soon as he saw me, and without even a greeting. 'You will marry me at once, or you will rue it! Look!'

"He took a bill from his pocket and unfolded it. I had seen a similar bill outside a London police station; it was a notice to the effect that a man named Clive Wilson was wanted on a charge of forgery; he had absconded, and his description was published—not exactly accurate, but sufficiently so to convince me that it was my Clive. He next showed me a newspaper cutting, giving particulars of the crime, and making a statement that left no doubt that it was my Clive who was meant. I felt the room going round, and Albert held me to prevent me from falling.

"'You have played with me, Alice Harland,' he cried. 'but I am not to be played with. I know where this lover of yours is, and if you do not consent to marry me immediately and by special license, I will set the officers of the law on him! Choose!'

"I chose to marry Albert Glover in order to save my beloved; I sacrificed myself for him, and as soon as it could be arranged I married Albert, comforting myself in my misery by the thought that I was a martyr for Clive's sake. I wondered how he could have fallen so low as to become a felon, and yet I felt that if I had had the chance, I would have flown with him to a new country to begin life afresh.

"My married life was unhappy. For a time Albert treated me kindly, but his love soon wore away. I found that he was really possessed of very moderate means, and had expected to make a brilliant match in marrying me, fancying that I should inherit a lot of money from father, and come into all my aunt's money. Alas! He had not long to wait in order to be undeceived. My father died within a year, and it was found that the property was mortgaged up to the hilt; in fact, when all was cleared off, there was nothing for me. Father, it seems, had counted on my making a good match with Clive Wilson, whose position was likely to improve as time went on. As for my aunt's money, she had speculated with it and lost it; she told me quite frankly one day, when discussing the position at the Hall after my father's death, that she had no money, and that Lord Rutcliffe would leave his to his own people.

"From that moment Albert Glover neglected me; he turned gambler to make a living, and there were times even then when I was not certain of a meal, although he usually 'made' enough to keep a fairly good house going. The life was distasteful to me, but I had become his wife and I did my duty.

"He died, and I was left alone in the world, my well-meaning but careless aunt having followed my father. Since then, I have eked out a living somehow, sinking lower and lower in poverty, despite my strenuous efforts, till I am now reduced to write the wretched story of my life in the hope of earning money for bread!

"What became of Clive Wilson? Someone told me that he was in Australia, whither he had gone on learning of my marriage; but that cannot be for he must have run away before he knew of it, in his endeavour to escape the consequences of his act."

Her story was finished, and Alice Glover laid aside her pen with a sigh. She had written feverishly, and the effort had exhausted her. She would not trust herself to read it through either to detect mistakes or to see if the style was suited to the journal to which she intended to take it. She carefully tied it up, after having written a note to the editor, and having addressed an envelope for the return of the MS. if unsuitable. Then, to spare expense, she walked to the office of the journal and dropped it into the letter box.

She waited anxiously for the result. The idea opened a new field of work; if accepted, she might gain a footing there, and write other stories, not so true, perhaps. Those who would read her true story would believe it to be fiction, so she might as well write fiction another time.

Nearly a week passed before she received a letter from the office; it was an ordinary envelope, so her MS. was not rejected. Perhaps it contained a cheque. She opened it with trembling hands; the editor would like to see her concerning her story, and he named the time.

She went to the office and was shown into the great man's room. He was seated with his back to her, and it occurred to Alice that this was an awkward position for him, and that he would be better if his desk faced the other way. She walked up to him, and waited for him to turn round.

The editor rose, taking up her MS. as he did so, but not turning to face her.

"This story is a good one," he said slowly, "and it interests me greatly, Mrs. Glover, but I should prefer a happier ending."

"It is a real story, sir," she faltered, "and in real life things do not always end happily."

"They do sometimes, Alice," he cried in an altered voice, facing her abruptly, "and if *that* is the explanation, then it *can* end happily!"

"Clive!" she gasped. "I thought you——"

"That man played us both false, Alice," said he sadly. "I never committed such a crime, and that bill and newspaper cutting were printed by him expressly to deceive you. He must also have written the letter which I received from you, saying that you no longer cared for me, and asking me to release you and go abroad, so that we might never meet! I went to Australia, where I became a journalist, and a year ago I came back and accepted the editorship of this journal. Alice, I have never ceased to love you. Is it possible for us to make this story end happily? Do you love me still?"

"Oh, Clive, my love!"

He clasped her in his arms, and she nestled against the breast of her real lover.

George Day.

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Alarming Medical Report on Deafness.

THE reports of three different authorities, including one from a Government expert, lately published in a medical journal, show that deafness prevails among school children to an alarming extent; in fact, that more than one-half have defective hearing and ear diseases. It is most important, therefore, that parents should be aroused to their responsibility in this matter, as attention to an ear trouble in childhood would prevent the development of obstinate deafness later in life.

To aid in educating people to the dangers of neglecting ear affections, a London Medical Institute has published a pamphlet containing much interesting information on the subject. The question of hygiene is well treated, and there is an article on the different systems commonly used in the treatment of ear, nose, and throat diseases. There is also a description of the new treatment, based on outward applications behind the ears, acting by absorption through the skin. This treatment, which can be applied at home, is said to have wrought cures in a large number of cases previously supposed to be hopeless.

Persons having children whose hearing is defective, or who are affected themselves, should write for this pamphlet which is distributed or forwarded gratis. The address is, The Secretary of the Drouet Institute for the Deaf, 10 Marble Arch, Hyde Park, London. A patient's Report Form is also issued to those who may wish to write for advice, for which no fee is charged if given by correspondence. Whenever possible, those who seek advice for deafness or ear, nose, and throat ailments should visit the Institute for a personal Consultation with the Medical Staff. Consultation hours are, weekday mornings, ten to twelve; afternoons, two to four. For personal Consultations a small fee of 5s. is charged.

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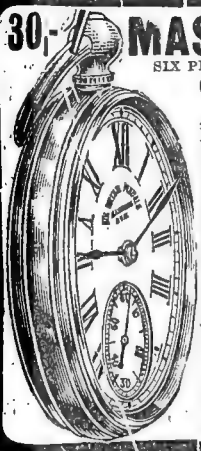

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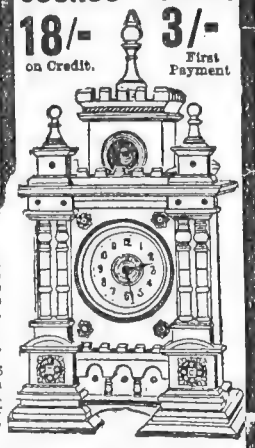

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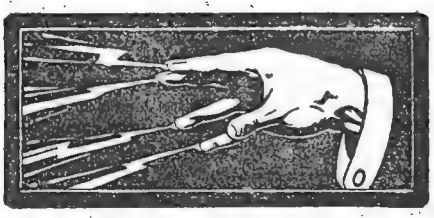

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"You're a nice little boy, Tommy," said Mr. Newman. "That's what they all say when they first meet sister," Tommy remarked.

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"Only ten minutes before my train goes! Can I ever catch it?" exclaimed a pretty girl, flying downstairs. "Just imagine it's a man, and you'll catch it," called the crusty old bachelor after her.

Gave the Show Away.

Miss Gushington: "I admit, Arthur, that this is not the first time I have been engaged, but I'm sure your noble, generous heart——" Little Brother: "Sis, the baby's got your bunch of engagement rings."

Such a Coarse Girl!

George: "You do not call on Miss Rosebud now?" Jack: "No, I got disgusted. She has such a coarse laugh." George: "I never noticed that." Jack: "You would if you'd been within hearing when I proposed to her."

Only the Bric-a-brac!

Algernon (making a call): "What are these noises I hear, Miss Maud?" Miss Maud (whose mother is vindictively making a wholly unnecessary noise in washing the dishes): "It's dear mamma. She dearly loves to sort over the *bric-à-brac*."

The Cheek Remained.

Her head had dropped upon his shoulder. "If only," he whispered, "thy cheek could remain there for ever." Little thought he what was to be. Little thought he until he got home and tried to remove the cheek from his dress coat with ammonia and alcohol.

Was It the Dye?

Mrs. Youngwife: "Just think, Harry, all our chickens died to-day." Harry: "Is that so? What ailed them?" Mrs. Y.: "I'm sure I don't now. It's a great disappointment to me, too, for I had fed them with different coloured dyes so they would lay Easter eggs."

No Light Affection for Her.

"I do love you, Mabel! You know it is 'in the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.'" "So I thought. No, Mr. Brown; no light Spring business for me! I want the honest affection that shows itself in the Autumn, when the theatres and concerts commence. Good-bye, Mr. Brown."

Not Possible.

"I see by the paper," said Mrs. Hicks, "that you can buy a sealskin from the Esquimaux for two iron hoops and a tenpenny nail." "Very true," returned Hicks; "but I can't spare the time to take the hoops and the nail to the Esquimaux, and my bank wouldn't honour a cheque for two hoops and a tenpenny nail, so I don't see how we are benefited by that state of affairs."

Held a Better Hand Then.

She (half suspiciously): "Did you ever hold a hand that you would like to hold better than mine?" He: "Only once, darling. Then I went nap."

Bad Signs.

Mrs. Oldfidget is much worried about her daughter. The other night she kissed her, and the young lady murmured in her sleep: "Oh, Charlie, you've shaved off your moustache!"

Proof of It.

Country Lover: "Do you really love me, Jane?" Jane (impatiently): "Goodness me! You know well enough I do. Do you s'pose I would have lent you a shilling last summer to put on a 'hoss' race if I didn't?"

Hard Luck!

Photographer: "Can you assume a more pleasant expression than that? Just think of your best girl a few minutes." Young Man (sadly): "It wouldn't do any good. She refused me about a week ago."

The Right Expression.

Stage Manager: "You do not inject enough contempt, spite, and venom into that word." Actress: "I can do no better." Stage Manager: "Nonsense! Speak it just as you say 'plush,' when you meet a rival in a sealskin jacket."

The Horrid Man!

She: "No, thank you; I don't care to know him. He is a most detestable person." He: "There must be some mistake. Everybody speaks well of him." She: "I don't care. He was one of the judges at the dog show, and he wouldn't give poor little Fido a prize."

Something Like It.

Her *fiancé* (who has not known her very long, and is inclined to be jealous): "Er—er—Clara, dear, did you ever have a—er—er—an experience like this before?" Clara (innocently—she was sitting on his knee): "Well, George, I once sat on the top rail of a fence."

Sweet Innocence.

He had just bought a few acres in the country and proposed to set himself up as a gentleman farmer. "Well, Ethel, I am going over to old Mossback's this morning to buy a cow that will give good milk." "Yes, we want good milk, Charles; and we also want a cow that will give good cream."

Didn't Want to Marry Her.

She: "It is useless to urge me to marry you. When I say no, I mean no." He: "Always?" She: "Invariably." He: "And can nothing ever change your determination when you once make up your mind?" She: "Absolutely nothing." He: "Well, I wouldn't care to marry a woman like that."

Misunderstood Her Remark.

"Yes," said Mrs. Catchem, "those are my daughters over there on the sofa. They have half a million between them." It was not until they were married to those daughters that the young men who overheard the remark found out that Mrs. Catchem referred to the rich old man who sat on the sofa between the girls.

Dictated With His Arm.

Doctor: "From the condition of your hand and arm, I should say you are suffering from writers' cramp—too much exercise of one set of muscles." Young Business Man: "But I never write. I employ a typine." Doctor: "Um—engaged to her?" Young Business Man: "Yes." Doctor: "Do you—er dictate with your other arm?"

A Boarding-House Saint.

Bloomsbury Landlady: "Poor Mr. Lightweight died last week, and if anyone ever deserved to go to Heaven he did." Mr. Heavyeater (who is slightly in arrears): "Why?" Bloomsbury Landlady (weeping): "He always paid his board in advance, never complained if his bed wasn't made up, and oh, such a delicate appetite as that poor saint had!"

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Household Matters.

"KARKI."—I have handed your inquiry to "Isobel," who will, no doubt, answer it in her page of *Pearson's Weekly*. Will my readers please note that I only answer questions dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette, and not questions regarding recipes and other household matters?

Regarding Engagement Rings.

THE design of an engagement ring, "LOVELORN," is purely a matter of taste. The half-hoop pattern is certainly the most usual, but it is not an uncommon thing to see the stones in a cluster. As regards the number of stones in the ring, that is a matter to be decided by the taste of the prospective wearer and the pocket of the giver. Most engagement rings contain either three or five stones; there is said to be luck in odd numbers.

Is it Love?

LAST year "KITTY" became very friendly with a young man. They went out together and were introduced to each other's relations. During the course of a few months he went out to Canada to try to better his prospects. "KITTY" saw him off from Euston, and during the seven months he has been away they have corresponded regularly, but no word of love has been mentioned.

* * * * *

One thing that makes "KITTY" believe he cares for her, in a way other than ordinary friendship, is a remark he made to the effect that he didn't think it right for a fellow to get engaged, or bind a girl in any way, unless he were able to marry her right away, if need be. She wants to know whether she is right in assuming that he means anything.

* * * * *

You needn't apologise, "KITTY," for your long letter. I am always glad to be of service to anyone in trouble, and it is much easier to give advice when the full facts of the case are stated. I think you will be quite right in assuming that your—shall we call him friend?—really cares for you in no ordinary way, otherwise it is hardly likely that he would continue to write to you after so long an absence.

* * * * *

Three years will soon pass, you will find, and if he discovers that his prospects are brightening, he is sure to write something definite before long. Meanwhile, perhaps in some of your letters you can put out a feeler; say how you miss him and hope the day when you will meet again will soon arrive, or something of that kind. If his intentions are matrimonially inclined, he will take the hint; if not, there is no harm done.

A Troubled Lover.

"NINA" has a lover. She is not engaged to him, however. Most of her time is spent away from home, but when she goes there, which is usually once a fortnight, for the week-end, her lover is very attentive. During her absence, however, "NINA" has letters from her girl friends saying that he flirts with them. She has forgiven him many times, but at last is tired of doing so. Her friends say he has taken a turn for the better lately, and now he has written to her asking forgiveness again. What ought she to do?

* * * * *

You say you love him very much, "NINA." If so, I should advise you to send him your forgiveness; but at the same time tell him quite plainly that you do not approve of his conduct in carrying on with other girls during your absence from home. Of course, it may be that he is only flirting with you in the same way as he does with your friends. If this is not the case, it is about time you came to some definite understanding as to whether you are to become engaged or not. Next time you see him endeavour to lead up to the subject, and if he tries to turn the conversation, you will know that he is only trifling with your affections.

Wants an Introduction.

"F. H. R." is a soldier, and he knows by sight a young lady to whom he very much wants to get an introduction. So far as he is aware, they have no mutual friend, and though he knows her father, he does not like the idea of getting him to introduce them, for fear of meeting with a rebuff.

* * * * *

It looks rather as if the girl's father knew something about you which was not to your credit, "F. H. R.," otherwise it would surely be quite an easy matter to call in to see him one evening when you knew the daughter would be at home. An introduction in that case would follow naturally. If your relations with the father are quite friendly, I would recommend you to call in as I suggest. If not, it would be better to give up any idea of obtaining an introduction.

Chance Acquaintance.

"FALSE SQUALLER" sings in the choir at the church he attends and is getting very fond of a young lady in the congregation. He managed to scrape up an acquaintance with her, but has not seen her now for some time, and fears that she is offended with him for speaking to her without an introduction. He does not know her name or address, and wonders, if ever he sees her again, which he quite hopes to do, how he should greet her.

* * * * *

You hardly tell me sufficient about your acquaintanceship, "FALSE SQUALLER," for me to be able to advise you properly. You do not say how many times you spoke to her. If only once, it is quite likely she might be offended, but I do not think that would make her stay away from church. She is probably ill or away from home.

* * * * *

If you have only spoken to her once, and she appeared to resent your forwardness, do not take any notice when next you see her. If you have spoken to her several times, and she did not seem to object to it, I should certainly say that you might speak to her next time you see her.

When to Cut the Cake.

IN reply to "A CONSTANT READER'S" inquiry, the proper time to cut the wedding cake is just before the bride goes to change her dress preparatory to starting on the honeymoon. If a breakfast is served, she should cut it at the conclusion of the meal.

Cynthia

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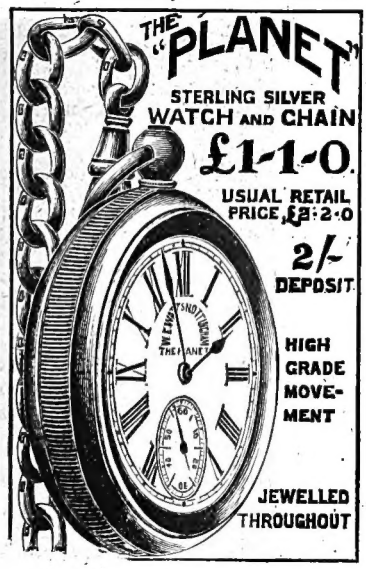

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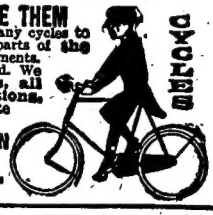

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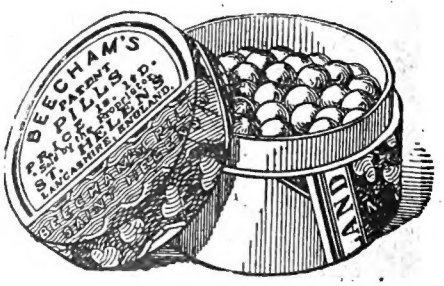

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